CN88 Handling cancer drugs – Inventory of the state of knowledge and educational opportunities in Sweden

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Conclusion

Deficiencies in training for new nursing staff and lack of regular continued education in Swedish cancer care identifies both patient-, and occupational safety risks. Stronger requirements for education are needed, in addition to improved education possibilities, introduction and refresher training.

Background

The Swedish national expert group for handling hazardous cancer drugs aim to develop and ensure the availability of educational activities for the safe handling of cancer drugs, both from a patient and occupational safety perspective. Handling hazardous cancer drugs require up-to-date knowledge and effective routines, to guarantee high-quality safe cancer care and safe working conditions for the involved staff.
The risks for occupational exposure, throughout the process, from preparation to excretion, are well documented, especially among nursing staff.

The aim of this study

To map knowledge and education levels for registered nurses and nurse assistants handling hazardous cancer drugs in Sweden, as well as to identify education needs, reported by 1st line managers.

Methods

A digital survey was sent out to 1st line managers in direct cancer care across Sweden. The managers, who responded anonymously, all had employees in their teams, handling anti-neoplastic agents, for example preparing, administering and/or caring for patients undergoing and/or in follow-up after treatment with these drugs.

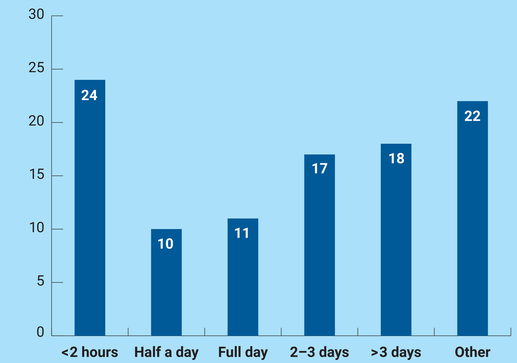
The survey included questions concerning training for newly employed nurses and assistant nurses, follow-up of training, guidelines related to pregnancy, experiences with risk assessments and routines for surface swipe tests.

Results

Out of 136 responding 1st line managers

- 22% (n=31) reported not providing introductory training before new nurses started to administer hazardous cancer drugs. For nurse assistants, 79% (n=108) of the managers reported no introductory training before caring for patients receiving cancer drugs.
- 50% stated having no requirements for compulsory training for nurses before handling cancer drugs.
- 58% (n=79) of the managers stated that there was no regular follow-up of the nursing staff's knowledge levels.
- 35% (n=48) reported to perform annual risk assessments while only 17% (n=24) reported performing regular surface swipe tests for monitor occupational exposure.
- The majority, 94% (n=128) of managers stated that guidelines for pregnant women were in place, but not for staff planning a pregnancy.
- The duration of the training interventions varied widely, from less than two hours to more than three days for nurses. The majority of managers responded that the assistant nurses received less than two hours of training.

The duration of the training interventions for new nurses



There is a need for:

- A National introductory education program for nursing staff handling hazardous cancer drugs should be mandatory
- Repeated education programs to follow-up knowledge and skills need to be provided
- All workplaces should have guidelines in place to avoid occupational exposure of hazardous cancer drugs during pregnancy, including planned pregnancy
- All workplaces handling hazardous cancer drugs should have routines in place for systematic testing for occupational exposure (surface swipes)

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