

# Understanding oral mucositis and the role of the nurse

Oral mucositis (OM) is a painful inflammation of the lining of the mouth and throat (oral mucosa) and is one of the most common complications of radiation and chemotherapy cancer treatments. It is extremely painful and debilitating for patients and has a serious impact on their quality of life (Shetty et al, 2022; Singh and Singh, 2020).

## Clinical significance

OM refers to erythematous and ulcerative lesions of the oral mucosa observed in patients with cancer being treated with chemotherapy, and/or with radiation therapy to areas involving the oral cavity. OM is often very painful and can compromise nutrition and oral hygiene, as well as increasing the risk for local and systemic infection. Thus, oral mucositis is a highly significant and sometimes dose-limiting complication of cancer therapy (Lalla et al, 2008).

## Epidemiology

Patients undergoing head and neck radiotherapy, haematopoietic cell transplantation and chemotherapy are at high risk of developing oral mucositis. Studies have shown severe mucositis occurring in 29-66% of patients receiving radiation therapy for head and neck cancer. In these studies, the incidence of OM was especially high in patients with primary tumours in the oral cavity, oropharynx or nasopharynx; those who received concomitant chemotherapy; those who received a total dose of over 5000 cGy; and those treated with altered fractionation radiation schedules. For patients receiving high-dose chemotherapy prior to haematopoietic cell transplantation, oral mucositis has been reported to be the single most debilitating complication of transplantation (Lalla et al, 2008).

## Role of the nurse in oral mucositis patient care

Nurses have a critical role in all aspects of managing OM, including assessment, teaching oral care, administering



pharmacologic interventions, and helping patients cope with symptom distress (Harris et al, 2008).

Nurses have a number of responsibilities in managing OM: Effective assessment and monitoring of the oral cavity and symptoms; disease management, focusing on ensuring availability of appropriate intervention for patients; and oral care education. Nurses should also be involved in the development and implementation of standardised clinical practice guidelines.

There are certain universally accepted indications for oral care interventions, which include:

- Promoting patient compliance with oral care regimens;
- Regular assessment of the oral cavity;
- Patient education;
- Comfort measures;
- Initiating therapeutic interventions.

## Therapeutic interventions

Cancer patients have a strong need for integrative, non-drug, self-management, and self-efficacy enhancing applications for alleviating symptoms of OM (Steinmann et al, 2021). These can include (Brown and Gupta, 2020):

- General oral care protocols;
- Washes, rinses, ice chips (cryotherapy);
- Topical anaesthetics;
- Analgesics;
- Mucoprotectants.

## What is GelX®?

GelX® is a mucoprotectant oral spray containing polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP), zinc and taurine indicated for both the treatment and prevention of OM (Galen, nd), providing effective pain relief, reducing inflammation, and helping patients take control.

In one study, prevention was achieved in 37.24% of patients using GelX®. Of the remaining patients, 93.4% had a complete remission of their symptoms (Niculita et al, 2020).

## GelX® benefits

- Blocks exposed nerve endings and coats oral lesions to soothe and relieve pain (Galen, nd; Biswal, 2008);
- Helps patients in coping with OM and completing long-term treatment goals;
- Available on prescription.

For further information, please contact: [customer.services@galen-pharma.com](mailto:customer.services@galen-pharma.com) or visit [www.gelxuk.com](http://www.gelxuk.com)

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