

ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of scalp cooling in preventing alopecia for patients receiving epirubicin and docetaxel.

The aim of this study was to establish the effectiveness of scalp cooling in preventing alopecia for patients with breast cancer who received the trial combination chemotherapy of Epirubicin and Docetaxel. Doubt remains about the general effectiveness of scalp cooling in preventing hair loss for patients receiving chemotherapy. There is very little information available about its specific effectiveness with combinations of Taxanes and Anthracycline drugs. Of the 40 patients who received this drug combination, 10 were included in a pilot study whereas the remaining 30 constituted the main study sample. A randomized controlled study was undertaken whereby the intervention group received scalp cooling via gel cool caps and the control group received no specific preventative intervention. Nurses assessed participants' hair loss using a modified version of the WHO scale at seven time points and also recorded hair loss photographically. Two independent experts rated the photographs using the same scale. Patients self-reported in relation to overall hair loss, hair condition, levels of emotional upset, negativity about appearance, hair re-growth and wig use. Significantly greater hair loss was apparent in the control group during most of the treatment period. However, the level of protection afforded by the cool caps was relatively poor with this chemotherapy combination. The marginal benefits of scalp cooling in this context must be clearly explained to patients.

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