

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SKIN TOXICITIES IN CANCER TREATMENT: AN AUSTRALIAN/NEW ZEALAND PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Systemic cancer therapeutics and radiotherapy are often associated with dermatological toxicities that may reduce patient quality of life and impact their course of cancer treatment. These toxicities cover a wide range of conditions that can be complex to manage with increasing severity. We reviewed common dermatologic toxicities encountered during cancer treatment, and offered measures for their prevention and management, particularly in the Australian/New Zealand context.

AIM

To provide a set of guidelines and educational resource for healthcare practitioners across relevant fields, consider the range and severity of skin toxicities resulting from oncology treatment, and recommend preventive and reactive measures for their management.

BACKGROUND

The Disease Burden

An estimated 162,162 new cancer cases were diagnosed in Australia in 2022, and 27,072 cases in New Zealand in 2020.^{1,2} Over 2 in 5 people (43%) are estimated to be diagnosed with cancer by age 85.¹

Most patients undergo surgery, with some progressing to systemic treatments: radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and targeted therapies. All systemic treatment modalities may be associated with dermatologic toxicities.³

Dermatologic Toxicities

Dermatologic toxicities (including alopecia, photosensitivity, and xerosis), affect up to 60% of patients undergoing oncology treatment, exacerbating their treatment burden.^{4,5} However, no set guidelines currently exist for appropriate management of such side effects.

Limitations of access to the few Dermatologists in New Zealand often result in oncology treatment being interrupted because of the severity of side effects.

Patient Journey

Experts have emphasised the relevance of patient education around appropriate skincare at each stage of the patient journey, to address key patient needs and quality of life.

This should consider advice from oncologists, dermatologists, and oncology nurses (often the most frequent point of patient contact), as well as the stage of treatment and the healthcare professional who will be responsible for delivery of the information.

The Role of Skin Care

Dermo cosmetics are non-prescription products that confer both cosmetic and therapeutic benefits. Formulated with key active ingredients, they may provide support for skin barrier maintenance and help rebalance the cutaneous microbiome.

METHODS

A multidisciplinary group of healthcare professionals, including oncologists, dermatologists and an oncology nurse practitioner, met to discuss the role of dermocosmetics in the management of cancer treatment-related skin toxicities, and develop a consensus for their effective management.

OUTCOMES

Proactive Measures

Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure skin toxicities are managed proactively, prior to cutaneous symptom onset. Regardless of symptoms, the panel recommended an emphasis on education around potential side effects and encouraged the use of pH-balanced cleansers and moisturisers, as well as appropriate photoprotection.

Reactive Measures

Specific measures should depend on the type of adverse skin event being experienced by the patient.

A Phased Approach

All healthcare professionals and patients are advised to follow a phased approach when commencing cancer treatments, as indicated in **Figure 1**.

PRIOR TO SYMPTOM ONSET	MILD CUTANEOUS ADVERSE EVENTS ONCLO	MODERATE CUTANEOUS ADVERSE EVENTS	SEVERE CUTANEOUS ADVERSE EVENTS
<p>EDUCATION: SKIN CARE FOR PATIENTS UNDERGOING CANCER TREATMENTS</p> <p>POTENTIAL SKIN ADVERSE EVENTS</p> <p>PROACTIVE SKIN CARE: ENCOURAGE USE OF pH-BALANCED CLEANSER, MOISTURISER AND APPROPRIATE PHOTOPROTECTION</p>	<p>ONCOLOGY HOMECARE NURSE TRIAGE (IN-PERSON, EMAIL, VIRTUAL APPOINTMENT, PHONE).</p> <p>ASSESS SEVERITY</p> <p>IMPLEMENT SPECIFIC RECOMMENDED DERMOCOSMETICS AS ADJUVANT</p> <p>CONTINUE PROACTIVE SKIN CARE AS APPROPRIATE + CAMOUFLAGE IF PATIENT DESIRES</p>	<p>ASSESS SEVERITY</p> <p>CONTINUE SPECIFIC DERMOCOSMETICS AND PROACTIVE SKIN CARE AS APPROPRIATE + CAMOUFLAGE IF PATIENT DESIRES</p> <p>INITIATE ADDITIONAL MEDICAL THERAPIES</p> <p>INVOLVE DERMATOLOGIST</p>	<p>ASSESS SEVERITY AND THREAT TO LIFE</p> <p>DERMATOLOGY REFERRAL</p> <p>ACUTE CARE AS APPROPRIATE</p>

SEVERITY OF CUTANEOUS SYMPTOMS

Figure 1. A phased approach to address stages of the patient's skin care journey, following commencement of oncology treatment. Adapted from Dreno *et al.* (2023).⁶

DISCUSSION

Amongst other recommendations, these guidelines emphasised the proactive use of broad-spectrum UVA/UVB sunscreen for prevention and management of dermatological toxicities. Use of a pH-balanced moisturiser and cleanser, plus creams that restore the skin barrier and are formulated with microbiome-rebalancing ingredients (such as panthenol), were also highlighted.

CONCLUSION

The consensus document forms an educational resource for healthcare professionals across the field, including pharmacists, oncology registrars-in-training, and experienced specialists. Increasing data provide support for the beneficial impact of dermocosmetics in the management of cancer treatment related skin toxicities.

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