

# EVALUATING THE LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF MEDICINES AND NEED FOR INFORMATION AMONG PEOPLE CARING FOR PEDIATRIC CANCER PATIENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

- Pediatric cancer patients visiting the out patient clinics are often prescribed several medications. However, there is limited data describing the caregivers' knowledge about the patients' medications and their educational needs.
- The purpose of our study was to evaluate the level of medication knowledge and educational needs among caregivers of pediatric patients in the out-patient clinics of a comprehensive cancer center.

## METHODS

- Caregivers of pediatric cancer patients were asked to complete a self- administered questionnaire, after they received medication counseling from the out-patient pharmacy.
- Caregivers who are illiterate were excluded from the study.
- The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions with a 4- point Likert scale, ranging from excellent to very poor.
- The questionnaire assessed the caregivers' level of knowledge about: indications, dosing, side effects, drug-food interactions and storage requirements.
- Educational needs were assessed by having questions related to the caregivers' ability to administer the medication safely and accurately for their pediatric patients.

## RESULTS

- The questionnaire was distributed to 103 caregivers and 87 (84.5%) completed it.
- Among the caregivers who completed the survey, 47 (54%) were caring for male patients while 40 (46%) were caring for female patients.
- The caregivers level of education was as follows: 40 (46%) completed high school, 38(44%) completed college education and 3 (4%) were post graduate.
- Sixty- six (76%) caregivers rated the counseling provided by pharmacists as excellent.

Table 1: Caregivers' Responses to the Questionnaire

| Questionnaire Item                                     | Excellent/very good (%) | Poor/very poor (%) |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Understanding medication indication                    | 95%                     | 5%                 |
| Understanding medication dosing                        | 99%                     | 1%                 |
| Understanding storage requirements                     | 93%                     | 7%                 |
| Understanding drug/ food interaction                   | 66%                     | 34%                |
| Ability to use oral syringes to administer medications | 78%                     | 22%                |
| Ability to swallow oral capsules/tablets               | 77%                     | 23%                |

## DISCUSSION

- To our knowledge, this is the first study that assesses the level of knowledge and the educational needs of caregivers of cancer pediatric patients.
- Administering medications using oral syringes is an important practice in pediatric cancer patients, however , about one- third of our caregivers reported poor/very poor ability in using oral syringes to administer medications and poor/very poor ability to swallow medication.
- Knowledge about drug/food interactions is inadequate and is highly needed among caregivers of our pediatric patients.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Proper medication counselling and education is an important area of improvement for caregivers of pediatric cancer patients.
- More research is necessary to assess the needs of the caregivers.