PPE When administering chemotherapy

“Are we wearing the right gowns?”
A nurse asked if the yellow “contact precaution” gowns always worn to administer chemotherapy medications were the right protection. In inpatient, outpatient, and procedural area where chemotherapy is given, these gowns are worn for up to 10 hours a day. When investigated, it was discovered that they are not tested for protection against exposure to hazardous chemicals and are not impermeable to liquids.

Chemotherapy exposure poses a known health hazard to humans. And according to a new study, published online August 16, 2011 in BMJ Quality & Safety, the overall rate of exposure to the skin or eyes in the past year among nurses working in outpatient settings, was 16.9%.

A variety of exposure control measures were already in place such as laminar flow hoods for preparation, chemo tested gloves and a closed system transfer device for all chemotherapy IV lines to minimize spills and aerosolization.

Updating practice
Our goal was to use current recommendations to determine the best PPE for nurses to wear for chemotherapy protection and administration while involving staff in determining the most comfortable product of the available options.

The Team
The nursing staff of outpatient Hematology/Oncology & BMT
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Meggie Galligan, RN, OCN unit based educator
Erin Tardanico, RN, OCN unit based educator
Chip McIntosh, NP Director of Clinical Quality Value Analysis
The CQVA committee

Fact finding
- Gather recommendations from the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) and ASHP (the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists).
- Benchmarking what other institutions were using locally and nationally.
- Evaluating current practice of inpatient nursing, outpatient nursing and pharmacy.

A Mini-vendor Fair
Staff in outpatient oncology piloted a product and discovered issues. The gown was:
- uncomfortably hot to wear
- so long that some staff tripped over it
- the coated fabric was noisy
- Offensive smelling to staff and patients.

Patients also complained about staff appearance, suggesting it looked unprofessional to be wearing a “blue shower curtain.” Chip coordinated a mini-vendor fair allowing nurses to see the options available and make a choice to fit their needs. The chosen PPE was purchased and is now available in each of the chemotherapy administration areas.

The Results

- As a result of this work, the nurses who administer chemotherapy now have a chemo-protective gown to add to their environmental controls to reduce occupational exposure to harmful drugs.
- It also raised awareness about the overall use of PPE and pressed staff to look at their own practice of PPE use.

For More Information Contact
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