

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

# The Importance of Assessment Rating Scales for Chemotherapy-Induced Oral Mucositis

Laura A. Jaroneski, MSN, RN, OCN®

**Purpose/Objectives:** To review the literature related to chemotherapy-induced oral mucositis and highlight four empirically supported oral mucositis rating scales that oncology nurses can use.

**Data Sources:** CINAHL® and MEDLINE® databases, published articles, and supplemental publications.

**Data Synthesis:** Various oral mucositis rating scales have been developed; however, a lack of consensus exists regarding their use in clinical practice.

**Conclusions:** To date, standards of practice for the assessment of oral mucositis do not exist, yet clinical measures are necessary for oncology nurses to manage the side effect effectively. The selection of a valid and reliable rating tool is necessary for routine oral assessment and for facilitating optimal patient outcomes related to oral mucositis.

**Implications for Nursing:** Knowing patient risk factors and the circumstances that exacerbate oral mucositis are keys to performing quality oral assessments. Oncology nurses should make performing oral assessments with a valid and reliable rating scale a priority. Further research regarding oral mucositis rating scales is needed.

### Key Points . . .

- Barriers to routine oral assessment include knowledge gaps, absent and sporadic oral evaluations, failure to use a consistent tool, inadequate documentation, and inconsistency in using assessment data to guide clinical practice.
- Assessment is necessary to measure the various parameters of oral mucositis, including subjective (e.g., pain), objective (e.g., tissue damage), and functional (e.g., difficulty swallowing) status.
- Using a systematic, regularly scheduled oral assessment with a reliable grading scale designed for chemotherapy-induced oral mucositis will allow oncology nurses to recognize and monitor the progression of oral mucositis.
- Reliable oral mucositis rating scales, when employed routinely, will facilitate the use of appropriate nursing interventions for patients with oral mucositis and, ultimately, improve patient outcomes related to oral mucositis.

### Goal for CE Enrollees

To enhance nurses' knowledge regarding rating scales for assessment of patients experiencing oral mucositis.

### Objectives for CE Enrollees

1. Describe risk factors associated with the development of oral mucositis.
2. Describe advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of known assessment scales for oral mucositis.
3. Identify subjective and objective assessment parameters of oral mucositis assessment scales.

One of the biggest challenges facing oncology nurses is improving clinical outcomes for patients with oral mucositis resulting from cancer therapies. Oral mucositis is experienced by approximately 40% of patients undergoing chemotherapy (Brown & Wingard, 2004; Dodd, 2004b; Fulton, Middleton, & McPhail, 2002). Cancer therapies can produce a multitude of side effects; however, oral mu-

citis is considered the most distressing to patients (Brown & Wingard; Epstein & Schubert, 2004).

Oral mucositis is an inflammatory response of the tissue to cancer or the chemical or physical effects of chemotherapeutic agents (Fulton et al., 2002). The response can cause oral tissue to become thin, denuded, and ulcerated (Brown & Wingard, 2004; Fulton et al.). The pathophysiology of oral mucositis is a complex process that involves more than just injury to epithelial tissue. New evidence suggests that injury occurs in the blood

*Laura A. Jaroneski, MSN, RN, OCN®, is an oncology nurse at William Beaumont Hospital in Troy, MI, and an adjunct nursing instructor in the nursing program in the Health and Human Services Department at Macomb Community College in Clinton Township, MI. No significant financial relationship to disclose. (Submitted December 2005. Accepted for publication February 27, 2006.)*

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/06.ONF.1085-1093