DYNAMICS AND PROCESSES IN THE PERCEPTION OF COLORECTAL CANCER PATIENTS FACING SKIN TOXICITY DUE TO AN EGFR-I

Background

Epidermal growth factor receptor inhibitors (EGFR-I), such as cetuximab and panitumumab, are treatments that are frequently used in patients with metastatic colorectal cancer (mCRC). An important side effect of these treatments is skin toxicity which has a negative impact on patients' quality of life

Aim(s)

The aim of this study is to explore the dynamics and processes in the perception of colorectal cancer patients facing skin toxicity due to a EGFR-I.

Methods

An exploratory qualitative study was conducted, based on the principles of grounded theory. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were performed within two settings. In a first phase maximum variation sampling was used and in a later phase, based on the preliminary results, theoretical sampling was used. The data were analyzed in a cyclical process through thematic analysis and using investigator triangulation. For the main themes data saturation was achieved.

. Results

The dynamics and processes of the perception of skin toxicity were situated in three impact areas. First, patients described an impact on themselves due to the confrontation with symptoms, lower self-esteem and feelings of shame caused by the visibility of skin toxicity. This also affected their ability to cope with it and their self-management. Second, patients outlined an impact on others. Finally, patients stated that healthcare professionals (HCPs) provided emotional support and helped their coping process. In contrast, negative comments of others or from HCPs could lead to insecurity or frustration.

Discussion

The interviews revealed an ambivalence between struggling and tolerating skin toxicity. Thereby, skin toxicity could be tolerated since they saw it as a sign of a well-functioning cancer treatment. Research does confirm a relatively positive relationship between skin toxicity severity and tumor regression [1,2]. Additionally, restarting this targeted therapy gave hope when their previous cancer treatment did not have a favorable outcome. This hope may also promote tolerance of skin toxicity [3]. Next, previous research linked fear, frustration and shame to skin toxicity [3,4] which has been explored in more depth in our research.

Implications and future perspectives

Despite skin toxicity being an expected side effect of EGFR-I therapy, the interviews revealed that this side effect had a large impact. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of discussing this side effect with the mCRC patient in advance as a HCP and to counsel the patients and their relatives in depth when confronted with this skin toxicity. Thereby,

References

[1] Fornasier et al. 35(10), 1497-1509, 2018; [2] Rzepecki et al., 79(3), 545-555 [3] De Luca et al, 12(4), 104-110, 2021; [4] Chiang et al., 28(10), 4771-4779, 2020.