

BACKGROUND

Antineoplastic medicines, commonly referred to as chemotherapy, are critical in the management of colorectal cancer. This involves 5-fluorouracil/folinic acid and oxaliplatin (FOLFOX) or capecitabine plus oxaliplatin (XELOX) as first line treatment regimen. Despite its widespread use, patient awareness on the effects and safety of the treatment is still unknown.

AIM

To identify patients' misconceptions about antineoplastic treatment following initiation of treatment for colorectal cancer (CRC).

Prospective qualitative study:

- **An interview guide**, underpinned by the adapted theoretical Patients' Lived Experience with Medicines model for the oncology setting¹ was compiled, reviewed by expert panel and pilot-tested.
- **In-depth semi-structured interviews** was conducted on 16 patients who were administered their first cycle of FOLFOX/XELOX for the treatment of CRC.
- **Setting:** 113-bed national oncology hospital in Malta
- **Data collection period:** October 2018 to September 2019

METHOD

- **Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim** in denaturalised approach, with 10% random sample of transcripts undergoing accuracy check.
- **Data was analysed by 2 researchers independently** using an interpretative phenomenological approach
- **Key themes** were identified supported with the use of quotations



RESULTS

The results form part of a longitudinal study about the patients' experiences throughout their treatment journey with antineoplastic medicines. Misconceptions related to the prescribed antineoplastic treatment, as part of the Medicines Related Belief theme were identified.

Mode of action

- Only one type of chemotherapy exists
- Chemotherapy kills cancer cells only
- Chemotherapy is the only treatment for cancer
- In case surgery was performed, there is no need to receive chemotherapy
- Surgery is more beneficial than chemotherapy

*What does it contain?
Radiation?*
[63 year old female receiving FOLFOX]

Adverse effects

- Patients on chemotherapy will definitely experience hair loss
- Chemotherapy causes unbearable nausea
- Weight loss is a result of nausea and vomiting
- Chemotherapy causes tiredness and not being able to live independently at home

[...] Really afraid I will lose my hair... especially the beard!
[38 year old male receiving XELOX]

MISCONCEPTIONS

Method of administration

- Port-a-cath may be aesthetically visible from under the skin
- Use of complicated means to administer antineoplastic medicines
- All medicines given during a treatment cycle of FOLFOX/XELOX are antineoplastic medicines.
- Antineoplastic medicines exist only as parenteral formulations

It look simple here, as a drip, no?!
[73 year old male receiving FOLFOX]

Safety

- No need to inform healthcare professionals about any allergies to non-medicines
- No need to inform healthcare professionals about concurrent intake of herbal medicines or vitamins

I've started ginger pills and Vitamin C to prevent from catching a cold. Being herbal treatment, there's no need to tell the doctor.
[59 year old male receiving FOLFOX]

CONCLUSION

Patients had misconceptions about antineoplastic treatment, that persisted after attending nurse-led information session and following initiation of treatment. Active patients' participation in their care calls for the need of patient education due to their right to play an active role in decisions about their treatment. Healthcare professionals should identify and address common misconceptions that may be contributing inappropriately to patients' disease management. Hence, the need for an individualised information approach.