

A project to bring complementary therapies to those on dialysis

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Introduction

Evidence alongside clinical experience demonstrates that those receiving haemodialysis suffer from a poor quality of life and a high symptom burden not dissimilar to those with cancer. Complementary therapies are routinely accessible to cancer patients and are known to help increase a sense of well-being, improve symptoms and quality of life. Despite this kidney patients are not often the beneficiaries of such treatments. A pilot project was undertaken together with the cancer centre complementary therapies team supported by the kidney patients association to bring reflexology to some of those on dialysis.

Method

30 patients from an in hospital haemodialysis unit were identified by the renal supportive care team and offered 30 minute reflexology treatments weekly, over the course of 4 weeks. Patients with high acuity, troublesome symptoms, the elderly, frail, new starters and those having difficulty coming to terms with dialysis were engaged. Complementary therapists from the cancer centre administered the treatments. Symptoms were assessed by the renal supportive care specialist nurses' pre therapy to establish a base line symptom status and re assessed post treatment course using the POS-S Renal score.

Results

Of the 30 participants 14 were male and 16 female, the mean age was 61 years. 6 patients were unable to complete the post symptom score due to having transferred out, been admitted or died. Of the 24 that did 18 (75%) reported an overall improvement in their symptom score. 2 (8%) reported no change in the number or severity of their symptoms and 4 (17%) reported an increase in symptoms. The most prevalent symptoms were pain and anxiety/depression with 79 % experiencing pain and 75% suffering with anxiety/depression. Post symptom assessment scores showed that 9 (47%) reported an improvement in their pain and 44% reported an improvement of their symptoms of anxiety/depression. Feedback included patient's comments;

"Hand and legs not as achy"

"Enjoyed massage, cramps improved, helped relax".

"Very relaxing I am sleeping a bit better and for longer".

"Helped with pain in my leg, arm and shoulder helped me to relax more than ever wish it could continue".

"So amazing, so looked forward to it so relaxing and felt energised".

"Enjoyed, relaxing".

"It helped me to continue coming three times a week to dialysis"

Discussion

The project was well received by all those who participated. As well as a positive effect on symptom burden, feedback demonstrated that patients had really enjoyed the therapy. It helped with their sense of well-being, they reported they had benefitted from the contact that they had with the therapists and renal supportive care team. The project was funded for the therapist's time but we did not take account of the time involved for the renal supportive care specialist nurses in recruiting patients, symptom assessments or the further follow up needed to address the symptoms and other significant issues that were identified as part of the project which were considerable.