

A survey of the incidence of chapped lips and cold sores during cytotoxic chemotherapy, and the perceived effectiveness of self medicated lip salves

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ABSTRACT

Objectives This study evaluated the prevalence and severity of chapped lips and cold sores during chemotherapy, and the perceived effectiveness of self-medicated lip salves.

Methods One hundred and five consecutive patients receiving chemotherapy were given a specifically designed questionnaire at the Primrose Oncology Unit, Bedford Hospital.

Results One hundred (95%) were returned. Twenty eight percent reported regular sore lips before chemotherapy as opposed to 69% during chemotherapy. Sixty six percent of these used lip salves, but 82% of these reported little or no benefit. Of these, eighty three percent used petroleum-based creams, and of these, 9% reported that they were helpful. Seventeen used natural oil-based creams, and of these, 63% reported that they were helpful. Patients were 2.5 times more likely to have cold sores if they had chapped lips.

Conclusion and actions As the incidence of chapped lips more than doubles during chemotherapy, preventative lifestyle advice has been included in our patient information leaflets and website (cancernet.co.uk). In view of the strong difference in perceived effectiveness between petroleum and natural oil-based creams, since this survey, we have developed with the aid of patient survivors a natural oil based lip balm in compliance to EU manufacturing standards (76/768/EEC) (cancernet.co.uk/lips.htm)

Key words: chapped lips, cold sores, chemotherapy, salves.