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Health-Related Quality-of-Life Outcomes: A Reflexology Trial With Patients With Advanced-Stage Breast Cancer

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Abstract

Purpose/Objectives

To evaluate the safety and efficacy of reflexology, a complementary therapy that applies pressure to specific areas of the feet.

Design

Longitudinal, randomized clinical trial.

Setting

Thirteen community-based medical oncology clinics across the midwestern United States.

Sample

A convenience sample of 385 predominantly Caucasian women with advanced-stage breast cancer receiving chemotherapy and/or hormonal therapy.

Methods

Following the baseline interview, women were randomized into three primary groups: reflexology (n = 95), lay foot manipulation (LFM) (n = 95), or conventional care (n = 96). Two preliminary reflexology (n = 51) and LFM (n = 48) test groups were used to establish the protocols. Participants were interviewed again post intervention at study weeks 5 and 11.

Main Research Variables

Breast cancer–specific health-related quality of life (HRQOL), physical functioning, and symptoms.

Findings

No adverse events were reported. A longitudinal comparison revealed significant improvements in physical functioning for the reflexology group compared to the control group ($p = 0.04$). Severity of dyspnea was reduced in the reflexology group compared to the control group ($p < 0.01$) and the LFM group ($p = 0.02$). No differences were found on breast cancer–specific HRQOL, depressive symptomatology, state anxiety, pain, and nausea.

Conclusions

Reflexology may be added to existing evidence-based supportive care to improve HRQOL for patients with advanced-stage breast cancer during chemotherapy and/or hormonal therapy.

Implications for Nursing

Reflexology can be recommended for safety and usefulness in relieving dyspnea and enhancing functional status among women with advanced-stage breast cancer.