Docetaxel-Induced Alopecia Can Be Prevented

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SIR – Taxoids are new antineoplastic drugs that inhibit depolymerisation of tubulin. With docetaxel at 100 mg/m² as first line chemotherapy in untreated advanced or metastatic breast cancer patients, an overall response rate of 68% was observed. About 95% of the patients receiving docetaxel 100 mg/m² have a grade 3 alopecia. To prevent docetaxel-induced alopecia, we used a cold cap on 39 patients receiving docetaxel 100 mg/m².

To apply the cap as tightly as possible, we put a wet single-use mobcap on the patient’s hair (the temperature of the cap has to be around -25°C). Adherence to the scalp was made tighter with bandages. Cotton protected the nape, brows and ears. Chemotherapy was started 15 minutes after putting the cap on; it was changed 30 minutes after beginning the infusion. The second cap was worn for 1 hour. Alopecia was assessed according to International Union Against Cancer criteria. The 39 patients received at least three cycles of chemotherapy (21 patients received docetaxel as second-line chemotherapy [group 1], and 18 patients had previously received at least two lines of chemotherapy [group 2]). 21 patients had no alopecia (9 in group 1 and 12 in group 2); alopecia grade 1 was observed in 15 patients (12 in group 1 and 3 in group 2); grade 2 in 2 patients in group 2; and 1 patient had grade 3 alopecia (in group 2). Only this last patient had to wear a wig. Most patients experienced some headache for the first 15 minutes and cervicalgia.

In conclusion, the cold cap is an effective technique to avoid docetaxel-induced alopecia and contributes to improvement of the quality of life in breast and cancer patients.