

Medical Treatment of Cancer Pain

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Pain is one of the most important symptoms of cancer patients. However, according to metaanalyses, almost half of such patients found the pain care inappropriate. For chronic pain, the goal of treatment is not simply to stop the pain which has already happened, but to prevent it from frequent attacks. Only by this way can patients enjoy life with quality.

Medical treatment of cancer pain included analgesics and adjuvant medications. Analgesics can be classified into non-opioids, weak opioids and strong opioids. The choice of analgesic should be based on the types and the severity of pain. Although mild to moderate somatic pain and mild visceral pain may respond to non-opioids, most cancer patients require opioids. Weak opioids may have fewer side effects, but they have limitation in efficacy due to the ceiling effects. Patients may have more side effects upon first contact with strong opioids, but mostly can accept them after a few days due to the tolerance to these toxicities. For sustained pain control, a continuous around-the clock use of analgesics is necessary. Long-acting medications are preferred as the cornerstone of pain management for these patients.

Adjuvant medications offer extra pain relief besides analgesics. All of them have specific indications, which should be well considered before prescription.