Oncology Rx Update

Radiation Recall Dermatitis (RRD)

An uncommon and unpredictable event
This rare phenomenon is relatively well known yet poorly understood. No definite cause has been documented as to why RRD occurs. Unfortunately, this means we cannot predict which patients will experience this reaction.

Severe skin reactions with post-radiation chemotherapy
Soon after or during radiation, an acute but severe rash can develop when certain chemotherapy medications are administered. This sunburn-like rash usually appears in the area where radiation has been administered.

Chemo agents trigger this event typically more than 7 days after radiation. If an event has occurred in less than one week’s time, it could be the result of radiosensitization. Reports of radiation recall occurring from months to even years after irradiation have been described.

If necessary, chemotherapy may need to be delayed until the rash has healed. Oral or topical corticosteroids can be used to help reduce inflammation in order to continue with chemotherapy.

Signs of RRD include painful, reddening skin that may blister or flake off. Increased awareness may help with both early diagnosis and appropriate management for patients.

In patients that are experiencing radiation recall, it is important to inform them of the importance of reducing sun exposure and application of sunscreen if outdoors while healing. Also, wearing non-restrictive clothing may help to improve their comfort.

Common chemo-associated drugs

- Anthracyclines are responsible for nearly 30% of cases
- Taxanes associated with 20% of cases
- Various case reports have also been seen with other agents:
  - Gemcitabine (Gemzar®)
  - Methotrexate (Rheumatrex®)
  - Hydroxyurea (Hydrea®)
  - Capecitabine (Xeloda®)
  - Vinorelbine (Navelbine®)
  - Actinomycin (Cosmegen®)
  - Cyclophosphamide (Cytoxan®)
  - Fluorouracil (5-FU)

References: