Analyzing comfort levels of providers who treat pediatric patients to work toward improving children’s radiotherapy experiences

Blair Murphy, MD1, Lauren Maloney, BS1, Hannah Ono, CCLS2, Michelle Wade, RN1, Dorothy Ryan, RT1, Catherine Degnin, MPH, PhD4, Yiyi Chen, PhD1,4, Jerry Jaboin, MD, PhD1

1Oregon Health & Science University Department of Radiation Medicine, 2Oregon Health & Science University, 3Doernbecher Children’s Hospital, 4Oregon Health and Science University Department of Biostatistics

Introduction

- Children make up a minority of patients in radiation oncology clinics, thus providers often lack comfort treating pediatric patients (PedPts). This discomfort could contribute to poor patient experiences.
- We sought to determine our current provider’s comfort levels treating children in clinic through a seven-question survey.
- We hypothesized that greater training with PedPts would correlate with increased comfort level treating PedPts.

Methods

- Anonymous surveys were sent to radiation therapists (RTs), registered nurses (RNs), and medical assistants (MAs). MAs and RNs were grouped together for statistical analysis.
- Questions included:
  - years worked in provider role
  - prior education regarding PedPts during provider training (Y/N)
  - training at OHSU working with PedPts (Y/N)
  - having children of their own (Y/N)
  - percent of PedPts in clinic census (0-100%)
  - comfort level working with PedPts (1-10)
  - interest in child-life teaching session (Y/N)
- Kendall’s Tau coefficient for continuous variables, and Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test for binary categorical variables were used to correlate survey variables with provider comfort level treating PedPts.

Results

Overall, 25 of 32 providers responded (78%). Of the 25, 17 were RTs, and eight were RNs/MAs. RTs were significantly more comfortable treating PedPts than RNs/MAs (p=0.009) and had significantly more years experience in their roles (p=0.003). Prior training in provider roles or at our institution, percent of PedPts in clinic census, and having children did not significantly correlate with comfort level.

Child-Life Teaching Session

76% of respondents reported interest receiving further training with a child-life specialist.

Conclusions

- Greater training with PedPts did not correlate with provider comfort treating children. RTs with more experience in their roles were most comfortable treating PedPts.
- Providers who saw more PedPts in clinic expressed the lowest comfort levels.
- We are hopeful that continued staff development endeavors and collaboration with our child-life specialist team will improve provider comfort and pediatric patient’s experiences during radiotherapy.

Next steps

- Conduct annual teaching sessions with child-life specialists
- Seek input from pediatric patients and their parents on how we can improve the treatment experience
- Target opportunities to improve provider and patient education about pediatric radiotherapy to decrease anxiety regarding treatment delivery

Acknowledgments

- Hannah Ono, CCLS
- Umpqua Bank Innovation Award for Pediatric Cancer Research