Outpatient management of malignant pleural effusion by a chronic indwelling pleural catheter.


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BACKGROUND:
Previous studies have shown that a chronic indwelling pleural catheter (PC) safely and effectively relieved dyspnea, maintained quality of life, and reduced hospitalization in patients with malignant pleural effusions. Outpatient management of malignant pleural effusion with a PC may reduce length of stay and early (7-day) charges compared with inpatient management with chest tube and sclerosis.

METHODS:
A retrospective review of consecutive PC patients (n = 100; 60 outpatient, 40 inpatient) were treated from July 1, 1994 to September 2, 1998 and compared with 68 consecutive inpatients treated with chest tube and sclerosis between January 1, 1994 and December 31, 1997. Hospital charges were obtained from date of insertion (day 0) through day 7.

RESULTS:
Demographics were similar in both groups. Pretreatment cytology was positive in 126 of 168 patients (75%), negative in 21 (12.5%), and unknown in 21 (12.5%). Primary histology included lung (n = 61, 36%), breast (n = 39, 23%), lymphoma (n = 12, 7%), or other (n = 56, 34%). Median survival was 3.4 months and did not differ significantly between treatment groups. Overall median length of stay was 7.0 days for inpatient chest tube and inpatient PC versus 0.0 days for outpatient Pleurx. No mortality occurred related to the PC. Eighty-one percent (81/100) of PC patients had no complications. One or more complications occurred in 19 patients (19%). Patients treated with outpatient PC (n = 60) had early (7-day) mean charges of $3,391 +/- $1,753 compared with inpatient PC (n = 40, $11,188 +/- $7,964) or inpatient chest tube (n = 68, $7,830 +/- $4,497, SD) (p < 0.001).

CONCLUSIONS:
Outpatient PC may be used effectively and safely to treat malignant pleural effusions. Hospitalization is not required in selected patients. Early (7-day) charges for malignant pleural effusion are reduced in outpatient PC patients compared with inpatient PC patients or chest tube plus sclerosis patients.

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