

# **THE DEADLY CURE: PROTECTING PATIENTS AND HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS FROM THE HAZARDS OF CHEMOTHERAPY**

Team Leader: Kerry Caldwell, RN, BSN, CNOR

City of Hope, Duarte, CA

Team Members: Charina San Diego, RN, BSN; Ida Antonio, RN, MSN, CNOR;  
Sangmi Lee, RN, BSN, CNOR; Jeannette Ochs, RN, BSN, CNOR

## **Background and Significance**

Chemotherapy agents are highly toxic and hazardous drugs. In the recent years chemotherapy use in conjunction with surgical procedures has increased as a treatment modality for cancer. Because the preoperative setting is a non-traditional environment for chemotherapy administration, nurses within this specialty are seldom chemotherapy certified. Inconsistent practice and knowledge deficits regarding safe handling of chemotherapy agents were identified among the perioperative staff. A defined mechanism to alert the entire healthcare team of a patient's recent chemotherapy treatment was not established, resulting in patients and care providers being at risk for exposure.

## **Purpose**

An educational program was developed for the perioperative staff caring for surgical patients receiving chemotherapy to close practice gaps, ensure proper handling of chemotherapy agents, and clearly identify patients receiving chemotherapy.

## **Methods**

A team was formed to assess the current state which identified knowledge deficits and communication gaps regarding safe handling of chemotherapy agents. Didactic education presenting an overview of chemotherapy and demonstration of proper safe handling was conducted with the goal of creating a standard safe patient care process. The staff's competencies were validated through return demonstration and verbalized understanding of organizational policy and procedure for handling these hazardous drugs. A consistent process for identifying patients who have received chemotherapy was implemented.

## **Results and Implications**

Knowledge of safe chemotherapy handling and employing proper hand-over communication to identify patients who recently received these agents is essential in ensuring that the perioperative staff caring for these patients is not at risk for accidental chemotherapy exposure.