



Cancer Therapy Advisor

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Polypharmacy and Cancer

Abstract

Although the exact definition of polypharmacy varies, most describe it as the use of 5 or more concomitant medications. Polypharmacy is often portrayed in a negative light because it is a strong risk factor for adverse drug reactions; this risk is best managed through a comprehensive assessment of each medication and a review of the benefits and drawbacks tied to the administration of certain therapies in combination.

Polypharmacy is more likely to be present among patients with [cancer](#) compared with noncancer controls. and is estimated to occur among 11% to 96% of older patients with cancer, depending on the definition. The use of potentially inappropriate medications (PIMs) is associated with polypharmacy and is defined as medications that are prescribed without an evidence-based indication, have risks that outweigh the potential benefits, are associated with adverse drug reactions, or those that may interact with other therapies. Among elderly patients with cancer, the prevalence of PIM has been estimated to be 51%, but this rate varies between studies.

Though several studies have associated polypharmacy with noncancer mortality, its effect on patient survival and other patient outcomes in cancer varies by study.

