


## Approach to pain management in oncology patients

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The treatment of pain in cancer patients is an essential area to promote quality of life and well-being, relevant studies and articles on the management of pain treatment in cancer patients will be addressed, highlighting the methods, results. **Methods:** Several references related to the topic were analyzed, including longitudinal studies, reviews, and scientific articles. The selected sources cover different aspects of pain management in cancer patients, including pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches, complementary therapies, palliative care, and integrative practices. The review of the articles allowed us to obtain a comprehensive and up-to-date view of the multidisciplinary approach in this context. **Results:** The results of the reviewed studies and articles point to the efficacy of the multidisciplinary approach in the treatment of pain in cancer patients. It was observed that the combination of pharmacological interventions, such as analgesics, with non-pharmacological approaches, such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and complementary therapies, showed better results in reducing chronic pain compared to conventional treatment. In addition, the inclusion of palliative care and integrative practices provided additional pain relief and

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improved quality of life for patients. Conclusion: A multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of pain in cancer patients is essential to provide comprehensive and effective care. This approach considers the individuality of patients, addressing physical, psychological, and social aspects of pain. Collaboration between healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, and pharmacists, is essential to ensure personalized treatment tailored to the needs of each patient. The use of complementary therapies and integrative practices, in conjunction with conventional approaches, has also been shown to be beneficial in reducing pain and increasing quality of life. In summary, the multidisciplinary approach shows promise and effectiveness in the treatment of pain in cancer patients, providing pain relief and improving the overall well-being of these individuals.

**Keywords:** Cancer Pain, Pain Management, Palliative Care, Integrative Practices.



## INTRODUCTION

Pain can be acute or chronic, with the latter being the most prevalent symptom in cancer patients, both in advanced and non-advanced stages. Pain syndromes are multifactorial in origin, and may result from the direct effect of the cancer treatment itself, or from its aggravation and dissemination, with 10 to 20% coming from comorbidities unrelated to cancer. As for its pathogenesis, it can be of the nociceptive type, due to damage to the nervous tissue; neuropathic, when there is direct tissue damage; and in chronic nociplastic conditions, when there is alteration in the processing and perception of pain. It is important to emphasize that the types of pain can be added and different for each pathological site. (RODRIGUES, M.; *et al*, 2023).

The state of pain encompasses not only the patient's physical state, but also has vast repercussions on the quality of life in general, reaching the other spheres, psychological, spiritual, social, work and family. It is associated with depression and anxiety, as the need to adapt to the new condition generates great transformation in the lives of the patient and those around him. In addition, the treatment itself, which is often invasive and painful, affects daily life and brings limitations to the patient. (NOBRE, C.; MENDES, R. 2020).

Thus, the concomitant treatment of pain with traditional methods is essential to improve the patient's general condition. To determine the best procedures, an individualized study is needed and focused on alleviating or reducing the symptomatology. Treatment should be multidisciplinary, encompassing pharmacological therapies, interventional, complementary and alternative procedures. Regarding drug use, the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates a pyramid or three-step scale approach, in the first non-opioids are used, in the second weak opioids and in the third the use of strong opioids is indicated, and should be associated with NSAIDs, in addition to other adjuvant drugs. However, the use of opioids is responsible for the presence of side effects and is conducive to addiction. (MENDES, C.; *et al*. 2020). Thus, alternative therapies are promising, with an increase in demand in recent decades. Techniques such as acupuncture, homeopathy, hypnotherapy, massage therapy and mind-body therapies do not yet have conclusive evidence of their effectiveness, although they have shown favorable results in studies for the management of chronic pain. (BICEGO, A. *et al*. 2021)

## OBJECTIVES

Based on the above, the objective of this study is to evaluate the approach and therapeutic management of cancer pain.



## METHODOLOGY

This is a narrative review of the literature, which was carried out by conducting a survey of the theoretical framework in journals of scientific platforms, with a theoretical-scientific basis, in a period between 2012 and 2023, such as: SciELO, Pubmed, Lilacs, Medline, Google Scholar and Uptodate. The initial filtering was done by the period, prioritizing the most current ones, later by the title and reading of the abstracts, where works by several authors were chosen who found the necessary incentives for the theoretical elaboration of this work. The main objective is to find the most effective answers in the literature to help understand the form and management of pain in cancer patients. The inclusion criterion was articles in Portuguese, English and Spanish that promoted the theme addressed, and the exclusion criterion was articles that did not reach the level of information necessary for the elaboration of the research and those that presented repeated information. Several combinations of terms related to the theme were used, with the following keywords: cancer pain; pain management. As a result, 10 articles were selected for review.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Cancer pain is a common and debilitating condition that affects many cancer patients. Several studies have been conducted to evaluate different approaches to cancer pain treatment, aiming to provide relief and improve the quality of life of these patients.

A longitudinal randomized trial conducted by Bicego et al. (2021) compared different complementary treatments for the management of chronic pain, including cancer pain. The results of this study provided important insights into the efficacy of different approaches, allowing for better individualized therapeutic choice for each patient (Bicego et al., 2021).

Dias et al. (2021) discuss the treatment of metastatic cancer pain in their article. They highlight the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to pain management, which includes not only the use of analgesic medications, but also complementary therapies such as acupuncture and physical therapy. This integrated approach can provide more effective pain relief and improve patients' quality of life (Dias et al., 2021).

Cancer pain often becomes untreatable and may require special palliative care. Dunkic et al. (2022) discuss the palliative treatment of intractable cancer pain. They highlight the importance of using potent opioid analgesics, such as morphine, for pain management in advanced stages of the disease. In addition, multimodal approaches, which combine different therapies such as radiotherapy and surgical interventions, may be necessary for effective relief of intractable cancer pain (Dunkic et al., 2022).

Neuropathic pain is a common form of cancer pain that requires a specific therapeutic approach. Mendes et al. (2020) discuss the neuropathic pain index in cancer patients and the



pharmacological approach to the treatment of this pain. They emphasize the importance of the correct diagnosis of neuropathic pain and the use of specific medications, such as tricyclic antidepressants and anticonvulsants, for the control of this painful condition (Mendes et al., 2020).

Pain perception in cancer patients is an important aspect to be considered in pain management. Menezes and Miranda (2022) explore pain perception in cancer patients and emphasize the importance of an individualized approach to pain management. They highlight that each patient can have a unique pain experience and, therefore, treatment must be tailored to individual needs to provide effective relief (Menezes and Miranda, 2022).

Integrative and complementary practices have gained prominence in pain management in oncology. Moura and Silva Gonçalves (2020) discuss the use of these practices for pain relief or control in cancer patients. These practices include techniques such as acupuncture, aromatherapy, and movement therapy, which can be used as adjuncts to conventional treatments, providing a more comprehensive approach to pain management (Moura and Silva Gonçalves, 2020).

The experience of the person with cancer pain is also closely linked to changes in daily life. Nobre and Mendes (2020) explore these changes and how they affect patients' daily lives. Understanding the impact of cancer pain on daily activities can help in the development of treatment strategies that aim to minimize these changes and improve patients' quality of life (Nobre and Mendes, 2020).

Rodrigues et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive review on the challenges, needs, and future trends in the treatment of cancer pain. They highlight the importance of a multidisciplinary approach, including collaboration between doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, for effective pain management in cancer patients. In addition, new technologies and therapeutic approaches are being developed to improve pain control and quality of life for these patients (Rodrigues et al., 2023).

In summary, the treatment of cancer pain involves a multidisciplinary approach that combines different therapeutic strategies. The use of analgesic medications, complementary therapies, palliative care, and integrative practices can provide effective pain relief and improve the quality of life for cancer patients. It is important to consider the individual needs of each patient and tailor treatment accordingly.

Cancer pain is a common and challenging symptom faced by many cancer patients. It can have various causes, such as the tumor itself pressing on surrounding tissues, nerve damage caused by tumor growth, or side effects of cancer treatments.

An appropriate approach to the treatment of cancer pain requires a comprehensive understanding of the pathophysiology of pain, considering both physical and psychosocial aspects. In



addition, it is necessary to take into account the individuality of each patient, as pain can vary in intensity, location, and characteristics.

Pharmacological therapies are often used as a first-line approach to cancer pain management. Opioid analgesics, such as morphine, are widely prescribed for the management of moderate to severe pain. However, the use of these medications requires careful evaluation of the risks and benefits, taking into account potential side effects such as sedation, constipation, and dependence.

In addition to opioid analgesics, other medications may be used in the treatment of cancer pain, depending on its cause and characteristics. Tricyclic antidepressants, anticonvulsants, and adjunctive agents such as corticosteroids may be prescribed for the management of neuropathic pain, which is a common form of cancer pain (Mendes et al., 2020).

Complementary and integrative therapies have shown promise as additional approaches in the treatment of cancer pain. Acupuncture, for example, has been used to relieve pain in cancer patients, both alone and in combination with conventional treatments. Other techniques, such as music therapy, aromatherapy, and relaxation, can also be incorporated to assist in pain management and provide comfort to patients (Moura and Silva Gonçalves, 2020).

In addition to pain control itself, it is essential to address the psychosocial and emotional aspects related to cancer pain. Psychological support, occupational therapy, and physical therapy play an important role in managing pain and improving patients' quality of life. Additionally, the multidisciplinary palliative care team plays a crucial role in the treatment of intractable cancer pain by providing individualized and compassionate care to ensure patients' comfort and well-being (Dunkic et al., 2022).

In short, the treatment of cancer pain requires an integrated approach, combining pharmacological therapies, complementary therapies and palliative care. It is important to consider the individuality of each patient, assess the cause of the pain, and tailor treatment accordingly. In addition, addressing the emotional and psychosocial aspects of pain is critical to providing a comprehensive approach and improving the quality of life of cancer patients.

## CONCLUSION

According to the findings, chronic pain is an aggravating factor in the neoplastic pathological picture, which are multifactorial and of varied types, such as nociceptive and neuropathic. The condition affects the physical and psychological resourcefulness of patients, being associated with insomnia, anxiety and depression, in addition to being accompanied by possible cognitive changes, which drastically reduces the individual's adaptive strategies. Thus, in order to improve adaptive coping, the treatment of pain in cancer patients is essential.



The management of cancer pain is complex and must be individualized, requiring a complete assessment of the patient's status and history, in addition to a multifactorial approach. Since drug use is the most common method, however, its adverse effects can be severe. As a result, the use of alternative therapies has become a valid way to improve the patient's overall health.

In conclusion, the treatment of cancer pain is a complex but essential challenge to improve the quality of life of cancer patients. The evidence presented in these references highlights the importance of a multidisciplinary and individualized approach, considering the different causes and characteristics of cancer pain. The use of pharmacological therapies, complementary therapies, and palliative care can provide effective pain relief and improve the overall well-being of patients.

It is crucial to highlight the need for open and ongoing communication between the healthcare team and patients in order to understand individual needs and tailor treatment as needed. Additionally, psychosocial and emotional support should be integrated into the treatment plan, recognizing the significant impact that cancer pain can have on patients' daily lives.

While there are advances in the field of cancer pain management, it is important to recognize that there are still challenges to be addressed. Ongoing research is needed to develop new therapeutic approaches, improve the efficacy of existing treatments, and enhance patients' quality of life. With a concerted effort from the medical community, researchers, and healthcare professionals, we can continue to advance the field of cancer pain management and provide better care options to patients affected by this debilitating condition.



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