The delivery of chemotherapy at home: an evidence synthesis

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Plain English summary

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There is an increasing focus in the NHS on delivering care closer to home. Chemotherapy treatment is offered in community, home and hospital settings. To explore the differences between these settings for patients and service providers, a review of the existing evidence and a survey of current service provision were undertaken. An economic model was developed also.

The systematic literature review identified little robust evidence. The studies had small sample sizes and populations likely to prefer home or community settings. They demonstrated little difference in terms of quality of life, physical or emotional symptoms, or adverse events. Previous economic evaluations provided limited evidence on cost-effectiveness and for informing the economic model.

The studies about patient experiences indicated that decisions about treatment setting are strongly influenced by a desire for normality. The time and energy required for outpatient chemotherapy reduces overall quality of life and so patients prefer alternative settings. However, competing factors and patient preference reflected individual situations.

The survey showed wide variation in the current provision of home and community chemotherapy in the NHS. Eligibility varied by provider, with chemotherapy regimen and patient response to initial treatment in hospital important determinants.

The economic modelling was limited by a lack of data and by the broad variation in NHS treatment delivery pathways.

A better design for future research might be to nest a randomised trial within a larger observational study. For a reliable economic evaluation, broad observational data will be needed to explore variations and ensure generalisability.
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