

## **A description of the characteristics and nutrition-related outcomes of patients with head and neck cancers receiving feeding tubes at British Columbia (BC) Cancer**

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**Introduction:** A high proportion of head and neck cancer (HNC) patients receive tube feeds during cancer treatment and recovery. However, few studies have described the nutrition-related outcomes of these patients. Tube feeding can provide an effective means of nutrition for patients who have intake difficulties, such as swallowing or chewing during their treatment, which is especially important since up to 60% of HNC patients are malnourished at the time of diagnosis, or before beginning their cancer treatment.

**Objectives:** To describe nutrition-related outcomes of HNC outpatients who received feeding tubes during their cancer treatment at BC Cancer (BCC).

**Methods:** A retrospective chart review was conducted on 148 HNC patients receiving chemoradiation at all six BCC sites who received feeding tubes from 2017-2019. Data were retrieved from the Outcomes and Surveillance Integrative System database and the Cancer Agency Information System electronic medical record. Data retrieved includes demographic, and clinical characteristics and outcomes.

**Results:** Descriptive statistics revealed that 99% of patients had factors that limited their oral intake during their treatment, including altered taste, thickened secretions, odynophagia, dysphagia, reduced appetite, pain, and nausea (each symptom >50%). The majority of patients (82%) received gastric tubes, and 53% were inserted reactively. Twenty-one percent of patients had at least one complication with their tube. Throughout treatment 95% of patients lost weight, 47% of which lost > 10% of their body weight from treatment start.

**Conclusion:** Most HNC patients receiving chemoradiation have factors that limit their oral intake. Tube feeding may help HNC patients to partially meet their nutritional needs, however patients still tend to lose weight during, and after treatment.

**Significance:** Describing tube feed interventions and nutrition-related outcomes can help Registered Dietitians to evaluate the current dietetic practice, such as tube type, use, and prescription, for HNC patients receiving tube feeds.