The addition of chemotherapy to radiation aids in the survival of patients with head and neck cancer but also increases acute toxicity, primarily painful oral mucositis and dermatitis exacerbated by xerostomia. The consequences of these side effects often result in hospitalization and breaks in treatment, which lead to lower locoregional control and survival rates.

No strategies reliably prevent radiation-induced mucositis; therefore, emphasis is placed on management to prevent treatment breaks. The NO SToPS approach describes specific multidisciplinary strategies for management of nutrition; oral care; skin care; therapy for swallowing, range of motion, and lymphedema; pain; and social support to assist patients through this difficult therapy.

At a Glance

- Daily nursing assessment of weight, vital signs, mucosal and skin integrity, signs of infection, secretion management, hydration, nausea, bowel function, and pain management can lead to early detection of complications for patients with head and neck cancer.

- The goal of early nutrition, swallowing, and psychosocial interventions is to avoid unnecessary delays or breaks in treatment caused by dietary or resource limitations.

- Mucositis and dermatitis management strategies are provided in a progressive, stepwise approach according to standardized rating scales.