Malignant Melanoma

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Melanoma
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Presentation of Case/Introduction
Suffering from a diagnosis of melanoma, a type of skin cancer which accounts for 90% of all skin cancer cases, is frightening. Many people expect it to mean the end of their life. The average age of diagnosis is 62, yet the disease can also affect younger patients. At the time of diagnosis, 86% of patients are between the ages of 50 and 70 (Cox, 2015). It is particularly challenging because only those with a history of any type of skin cancer are at risk for melanoma. Detecting melanoma early is key to managing the disease. Delaying diagnosis of melanoma increases the risk of metastasis and death. In order to help patients understand the disease, the American Cancer Society offers a 5-step plan for detecting melanoma:

1. Check the skin for changes in size, shape, and color.
2. Look for nonmelanoma growths.
3. Pay attention to changes in the color and size of moles.
4. Notice any changes in the color and size of other skin areas, including nails.
5. Check the skin for changes in the lymph nodes.

The 5-step plan is important because early detection of melanoma can improve treatment outcomes and reduce the risk of metastasis. Early detection can also reduce the cost of treatment and improve quality of life. It is crucial for patients to understand these steps and take action if they notice any changes in their skin. 

Underlying Pathophysiology
Melanoma is a malignant melanocytic tumor that arises from melanocytes, cells that produce melanin, the pigment responsible for skin color. Melanomas can be flat, raised, or slightly raised, and they can change in size, shape, or color. The most common type of melanoma is nodular melanoma, which is characterized by a dark, leathery surface and rapid growth. Other types of melanoma include superficial spreading melanoma and acral lentigious melanoma.

Significance of Pathophysiology
Melanoma is the most deadly type of skin cancer and the “number one deadly cancer” in the United States (American Cancer Society, 2018). It is particularly concerning because it can affect almost any part of the body, even areas that are not typically exposed to the sun such as nail beds, palms, and soles of the feet.

Implications for Nursing Care
A thorough understanding of the symptoms and signs of melanoma is crucial for nurses who care for patients with this disease. Early detection and treatment can improve outcomes and reduce the risk of metastasis. The 5-step plan for detecting melanoma is essential for nurses to teach patients and caregivers about the disease.

Signs & Symptoms

- Early stages of melanoma are best treated surgically, including the excision of the primary melanoma and the lymph nodes involved.
- Metastatic melanoma is more difficult to treat and is often associated with a poor prognosis.
- Symptoms of metastatic melanoma include:
  - Changes in the skin, including changes in color, size, or shape.
  - Changes in the lymph nodes or other organs.
  - Changes in the body, such as changes in the voice or changes in body position.
  - Changes in the nervous system, including changes in vision or motor function.

Conclusions
Nursing care for patients with melanoma includes:

- Teaching patients about the 5-step plan for detecting melanoma.
- Teaching patients about the early detection of melanoma.
- Teaching patients about the staging of melanoma.
- Teaching patients about the treatment of melanoma.
- Teaching patients about the prevention of melanoma.

References