



Another way to reduce congenital abnormalities is to ensure that all our young women patients have appropriate rubella antibody titres.

Robert Shepherd, MD
Gatineau, Que.

Reference

1. McSherry J. Folic acid and the pill [letter]. *CMAJ* 1998;159(3):218.

Asthenia and paralysis

In their article on the management of symptom complexes,¹ Dr. Eduardo Bruera and Catherine M. Neumann discuss asthenia and its treatment by pharmacologic means. Asthenia remains a significant limitation in people with neurologic impairment, in particular spinal cord compression necessitating rehabilitation before the patient can return home after initial treatment for

metastatic cancer. Even after screening to exclude underlying causes of cachexia-anorexia, electrolyte disorder, infection and hypoxia, and with concurrent use of corticosteroids, intensive counselling, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, these patients are often unable to participate fully in their rehabilitation because of the asthenia. Do Bruera and Neumann have any experience in using amphetamines and megestrol in patients with metastatic cancer resulting in paralysis? Is there a positive response in terms of fatigue in patients affected by both cancer and neurologic deficit?

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Reference

1. Bruera E, Neumann CM. Management of

specific symptom complexes in patients receiving palliative care. *CMAJ* 1998;158(13):1717-26.

[One of the authors responds:]

Our group¹⁻⁴ and others^{5,6} have had some experience with the use of amphetamines to treat patients with metastatic cancer. Most studies have been conducted in patients with opioid-induced sedation. In this subgroup, amphetamine derivatives appear to improve significantly the level of arousal, the degree of asthenia and the overall sensation of well-being. However, these drugs have not been used in randomized controlled trials in the specific group of patients with paralysis. Dr. Potter has identified an interesting area for future research.

With regard to megestrol, our group^{7,8} and others^{9,10} have found significant objective improvement as well as nutritional improvement in some patients with metastatic cancer.