Do Steroids Prolong Suffering? End-of-Life Care for Patients with Primary Brain Tumors (TH305)

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Objectives

- Recognize the various symptoms and treatments associated with the terminal phase of primary brain tumors.
- Recognize decisions for care that need to be reviewed with the patient and/or family in anticipation of the terminal phase of primary brain tumors.
- Recognize the indications for use of steroids in primary brain tumors and the implications for symptom management and life prolongation if they are discontinued.

Prognosis for primary brain tumors remains poor, despite aggressive treatment. In the late stages of the disease process, patients experience myriad symptoms for which there are little data in the literature to guide treatment decisions. These include seizures, headache, drowsiness, dysphagia, death rattle, agitation, and delirium. The literature that does exist suggests that end-of-life planning is limited regarding eliciting treatment preferences from patients or their surrogates, but that decisions are frequently made to withhold certain treatments in an effort to not prolong the dying process. In the studies that review the types of decisions made regarding withdrawal of treatments, steroids are often mentioned, but little explanation is provided as to the mechanisms involved and the implications for symptom management that may follow this decision. This session is designed to explore the withholding of steroids further in an effort to generate guidelines that will inform discussions with patients and families about end-of-life care in brain tumor cases, as well as inform the subsequent care of patients for whom the decision is made to withdraw this treatment.