Fostering Hope in the Patient With Cancer

Rebecca Lichwala, RN, BSN, OCN®

When a patient is diagnosed with cancer, feelings such as fear, anxiety, and hopelessness can negatively affect a person’s frame of mind. Hope can help a patient decrease anxiety and increase quality of life. Nurses should assess hope, provide interventions, be empathetic, listen, and treat patients with dignity to help improve hope and quality of life. This article features how hope can have a positive impact and provides specific information about how nurses can promote and foster hope in patients with cancer.

Assessment of Hope

The Herth Hope Index (HHI) assesses the levels of hope in patients. Although the HHI is not the only scale created to assess hope, it has been widely used in the literature and is designed for patients who are critically ill. The HHI consists of 12 questions and uses a four-point Likert-type scale. Scores range from 12–48, with higher scores indicating higher levels of hope (Herth, 2000; Rustøen, Cooper, & Miaskowski, 2011). Using the HHI, nurses can evaluate patients at various points in their cancer journeys. The HHI is an easy, consistent assessment tool used all over the world, and it has been translated into five languages (Herth, 2000).

QOL also may be assessed with patients’ hope levels. QOL and hope have been linked together and are shown to be part of an important coping strategy (Rustøen, Wiklund, Hanestad, & Moum, 1998). Many tools exist that assess a patient’s QOL, including the Quality of Life Index and the Cancer Rehabilitation