Hospital stays are becoming shorter, and care is increasingly technical, fragmented, and impersonal; therefore, recognizing patient psychosocial needs in a timely manner is critical (Gosselin, Crane-Okada, Irwin, Tringali, & Wenzel, 2011; Keller et al., 2004; Pasacreta, Kenefick, & McCorkle, 2008). Between 30%-50% of patients with cancer experience psychosocial distress (Gosselin et al., 2011; Keller et al., 2004). Patients report having unmet psychosocial needs and a desire for support at varied phases of their cancer treatment (Absolom et al., 2011). The National Comprehensive Cancer Network has suggested that psychosocial distress be considered the sixth vital sign (Holland & Bultz, 2007).

Nursing is a trusted profession, and the amount of time nurses spend with patients make them well positioned to play a key role in assessing patients and intervening to minimize psychosocial needs (Pasacreta et al., 2008).

The Institute of Medicine (2007) emphasized the importance of meeting the psychosocial needs of patients with cancer, but stressed that education regarding how to best approach sensitive topics, and poor communication between team members undermine psychosocial care. Inpatient nurses need additional training to provide excellent psychosocial care.