Domestic violence (DV), or intimate partner violence (IPV), is a prevailing problem in public health (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2004). IPV is a pattern of control using assault and intimidating behaviors that has devastating effects on individuals, their families, and communities (Family Violence Law Center, 2005). Standards of oncology nursing practice support that the psychosocial impact of cancer on patients and their families or significant others needs to be considered at all stages of diagnosis and treatment (Brant & Wickham, 2004; Harvey, 2003). The psychosocial impact of other personal situations or concerns, such as IPV, can add to the complexity of cancer management. Routine screening for signs and symptoms of psychosocial distress helps identify patients who require additional interventions. Oncology nursing practice is based on a holistic approach to patient care, which supports that identification of physical and psychosocial needs are equally important. Oncology nursing provides many unique opportunities to help patients cope with cancer. Routine nursing assessment for signs and symptoms of abuse will provide an opportunity to assist patients with cancer to manage not only the life-threatening aspects of their diagnosis but also the life-threatening aspects of IPV.

At a Glance

✦ Learning about intimate partner violence (IPV) can help oncology nurses identify and distinguish between signs and symptoms of abuse and cancer treatment side effects that may mask abuse.

✦ The holistic care approach of oncology nursing practice enables nurses to assess for the presence of IPV and provide informational and emotional support resources in response to patients’ identified concerns.

✦ Routine assessment for signs and symptoms of IPV provides a unique opportunity for oncology nurses to assist patients in managing any complex, life-threatening aspects of abuse that they may experience during cancer treatment.