Cancer-Related Fatigue: A Brief Overview of Current Nursing Perspectives and Experiences

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Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) has often been called the “sixth vital sign” and was the focus of a symposium at the Oncology Nursing Society’s 32nd Annual Congress, where nurses discussed CRF’s impact on patients. Despite this dialogue, current nursing perspectives and practice still need to be determined. The definition of CRF as a multidimensional symptom will be considered in this article. CRF may create psychological, functional, cognitive, and socioeconomic issues in patients. Challenges for effective management will be considered.

At a Glance
- Nurses may not routinely assess patients for cancer-related fatigue (CRF).
- Nurses have indicated that they often did not document CRF in patients’ medical records.
- Serious psychological, functional, cognitive, and socioeconomic issues may occur in patients suffering from CRF.

Cancer-Related Fatigue

Definition

According to the NCCN, CRF is a “distressing persistent, subjective sense of tiredness or exhaustion related to cancer or cancer treatment that is not proportional to recent activity and that interferes with usual functioning” (Mock et al., 2007, p. 1). CRF is a multidimensional symptom that presents as a continuum—ranging from tiredness to exhaustion—and reflects patients’ subjective perceptions of their energy, mental capacity, and psychological status. Fatigue is an unrelenting condition that interferes with individuals’ ability to carry out usual functions. Unlike normal fatigue experienced by healthy individuals, CRF is of greater severity, often is disproportionate to levels of physical activity or exertion, and is less

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