Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing  •  Volume 12, Number 1  •  Does Therapeutic Touch Help Reduce Pain and Anxiety? 113

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With more than 10 million patients with cancer in the United States, pain and symptom management is an important topic for oncology nurses. Complementary therapies, such as therapeutic touch, may offer nurses a nonpharmacologic method to ease patients’ pain. Using 12 research studies, the authors examined the evidence concerning the effectiveness of this type of treatment in reducing pain and anxiety.

Background

Therapeutic touch is a therapy in which the hands are used to facilitate the healing process (Lafreniere et al., 1999). The therapy was introduced in the early 1970s by Delores Krieger and Dora Kuntz as a noninvasive nursing intervention derived from ancient Eastern forms of healing (Kelly, Sullivan, Fawcett, & Samarel, 2004).

Several studies link nursing care to positive cancer therapy outcomes and suggest a need to explore nontraditional therapy modalities, such as therapeutic touch, as viable options to complement standard cancer therapy. A randomized, controlled study by Given et al. (2002) evaluated symptom management during chemotherapy and found that patients with cancer experience pain and anxiety during chemotherapy. The 53 patients in the experimental group and 60 in the control group were interviewed using a symptom experience scale, which measured symptoms, physical impact, and social functioning. The patients received standard care and chemotherapy, but the experimental group received additional nursing interventions for symptom management. Those interventions were tailored to individual issues and categorized as teaching, counseling.

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