Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing  •  Volume 19, Number 6  •  Chemotherapy Side Effects in Patients With Pancreatic Cancer

Nursing Implications of Chemotherapy Agents and Their Associated Side Effects in Patients With Pancreatic Cancer

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Pancreatic cancer (PC) has one of the poorest five-year survival rates of all cancers: 7% and 2% for all stages and advanced stages, respectively (National Cancer Institute [NCI], 2013b). One of the major reasons that PC is so deadly is because it often is diagnosed at a late stage, with about 53% of patients having metastatic disease at the time of diagnosis (NCI, 2013b). In addition, less than 20% of patients diagnosed with PC have localized, potentially resectable tumors (Hidalgo, 2010). Few symptoms of PC may be experienced in the early stages of the disease; however, symptoms are more likely to occur with more advanced disease (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2015). Jaundice, dark urine, light-colored stools, and itchy pruritic skin are common symptoms of PC (ACS, 2015). The spread of PC to the liver can cause jaundice and elevated transaminases (ACS, 2015). Back or abdominal pain may occur as tumors grow larger and begin to press on nearby organs or nerves (ACS, 2015). Diabetes may develop if the cancer has destroyed insulin-producing cells in the pancreas (ACS, 2015).