Nutritional care is an integral component of quality cancer treatment. Patients undergoing cancer therapy are at risk for developing a variety of side effects that impact their intake, absorption, and nutritional status. The issue becomes compounded in newly diagnosed patients who have preexisting poor nutritional status, comorbid diseases, mechanical obstruction, and metabolic abnormalities. Standards related to the role of dietitians are well defined in the literature and by the Joint Commission. The quality improvement project illustrated in this article clearly demonstrated the need for a dietitian in the radiation oncology clinic by using the Patient-Generated Subjective Global Assessment.

At a Glance

- Radiation therapy causes a variety of side effects that impact nutritional status.
- The Patient-Generated Subjective Global Assessment is a screening tool that can be used easily in the clinical setting.
- A dietitian can provide initial and ongoing assessment, intervention, and symptom management recommendations.

from a trained nutrition professional is essential in the outpatient setting. Patients feel better emotionally and physically and are more in control of their situation after having a nutrition consultation (Schiller et al., 1998).

Literature Review

Because dietary issues can arise, increase, and persist throughout all stages of cancer care, screening is important before, during, and after treatment with referrals to a dietitian if warranted. In a study of 50 patients with head and neck cancer receiving radiation therapy, 44% had eating difficulties.