Considering the Patient-Partner Relationship in Cancer Care:
Coping Strategies for Couples

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A cancer diagnosis, regardless of type or site, raises feelings of fear and loss of control in patients and their partners. Being married is associated with lower mortality from a wide range of illnesses, including cancer. However, the quality of marital interactions is a stronger predictor of health outcomes than marital status alone. When people face great life challenges, they attach importance to their intimate partner’s behaviors. Trust, a key component of relationship quality, can lend stability as well as emotional and practical support during treatment. This article will examine the results of research focused on patients with cancer and their partners and discuss the effects of a cancer diagnosis on couples. Recommendations for clinical practice include couple behaviors, communication patterns, and coping strategies. In addition, partners should be included in assessment and interventions to improve the quality of care for patients with cancer.

At a Glance

✦ A cancer diagnosis affects the lifestyles of patients as well as partners.
✦ Relationship quality has a strong influence on couples’ coping ability.
✦ Nurses should encourage patients and partners to use active engagement and open communication for optimal outcomes.

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