Management of Metastatic Melanoma:
Nursing Challenges Today and Tomorrow

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Advanced and metastatic melanoma is a devastating and deadly disease. No standard of care has been established to date. As the understanding of the natural history of this disease advances, agents directed at interrupting single and multiple steps in the proliferation, growth, and metastatic processes involved in melanoma are being developed and evaluated. Several agents (particularly anticytotoxic T lymphocyte–associated antigen 4 antibodies) are in development. The role of the oncology nurse in the care of patients with melanoma includes understanding and communicating to patients the disease process and goals for care, knowing the various agents and their associated efficacy and toxicities, and learning how to guide patients through the decision-making process.

At a Glance
- No real standard of care exists for patients with metastatic melanoma because monotherapy and combination treatments have failed to show an overall survival benefit.
- An increased understanding of the biology of melanoma and the immune system has led to several promising new approaches to the treatment of metastatic melanoma.
- Nurses play a key role in helping patients with melanoma understand their disease and treatment options, including supportive care, palliative chemotherapy, aggressive cytokine-based treatments, and participation in clinical trials.

Oncology nurses can play a critical role in the care of patients with melanoma. They can help patients and their families understand the disease process and prognosis, provide guidance in weighing treatment options, provide psychosocial support and recognition when intervention by a social worker or other professional may be beneficial, and manage disease- and treatment-related symptoms.

The lack of effective systemic treatment and the specialized expertise required for administration of cytokine therapies have resulted in the treatment of melanoma at academic referral centers.