Paraneoplastic Syndromes Related to Lung Cancer

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Paraneoplastic syndromes (PNSs) are defined as signs or symptoms that occur as a result of organ or tissue damage at locations that are remote from the primary tumor site or metastases. Many cancers are associated with PNSs; however, small cell lung cancer (SCLC) is the most prevalent. In SCLC, the systems primarily affected by PNSs include the endocrine system, the neurologic system, and the integumental system. This article provides an overview of primary disorders and classical syndromes, as well as symptom management associated with each system. PNSs are rare, and the best approach is to treat the underlying tumor. Therefore, oncology nurses and other healthcare practitioners should be familiar with PNSs so that they can take prompt and proper courses of action, potentially leading to positive outcomes for patients.

Endocrinologic Paraneoplastic Syndromes

Endocrinologic PNS results from an overproduction of specific hormones, which are strongly associated with specific types of tumors (Jameson & Johnson, 2008). Tumor cells may secrete a hormone or prohormone of a higher or lower molecular weight than hormones secreted by normal endocrine cells (Rugo, 2007). The most common endocrine disorders related to PNS are hypercalcemia, syndrome of inappropriate antidiuretic hormone (SIADH), and Cushing’s syndrome (Spiro et al., 2007) (see Table 1).

Hypercalcemia

Humoral hypercalcemia of malignancy most commonly is caused by overproduction of the parathyroid hormone–related protein (PTHrP) (Jameson & Johnson, 2008). PTHrP is structurally similar to the parathyroid hormone (PTH) and binds to PTH receptors (Jameson & Johnson, 2008). In addition, the PTHrP plays a role in skeletal development and also regulates cellular proliferation and differentiation in other tissues (Jameson &