Effective Transitional Therapy for Adolescent and Young Adult Patients With Cancer: An Integrative Literature Review

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Background: The adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer community has demonstrated a need for psychosocial help transitioning from acute cancer care to survivorship while navigating appropriate developmental challenges.

Objectives: The purpose of this integrative literature review is to examine the transition of AYAs from life as patients with cancer to life as cancer survivors and to evaluate the most effective, therapeutic ways to make this transition.

Methods: This integrative literature review focused on articles published from 2008–2015 using PubMed, CINAHL®, and PsycINFO. Key search terms were cancer, [adaptation, psychological], adolesc*, and young adult. Outcomes were evaluated using the Adaptation Model of Nursing.

Findings: Twenty-two studies met the inclusion criteria, but only four empirically examined interventions. Eighteen studies demonstrated AYAs’ unmet needs and suggested important therapeutic components. The four empirically examined interventions were dynamic group therapy, online cognitive-behavioral therapy, an online cancer forum, and an educational cancer retreat. Eighteen therapeutic themes were identified as integral to a complete and healthy transition. Five of these themes seemed to be of particular importance: education on cancer, coping, sexual identity, maintaining a sense of normalcy, and AYA support. The therapeutic themes demonstrate the highly individualized nature of transitional therapy and suggest that the type of therapy is less significant than the therapeutic components.