A diagnosis of a malignant brain tumor is devastating to patients and their families. The patients’ inevitable loss of independence, which can occur suddenly or gradually, is tragic, and the eventual complete dependence can be overwhelming to the family and caregivers. Glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) is the most common type of primary malignant brain tumor in adults and is associated with a disproportionately high mortality rate. The highly malignant tumor grows rapidly and has a tendency to recur through treatment. The brain itself presents a multitude of barriers to treatment, such as tumor location, accessibility for surgery, and the blood-brain barrier’s natural protection. Despite access to optimal multimodality treatment, patients diagnosed with GBM have a low survival rate. Patients and families need emotional and practical support throughout the continuum of this devastating disease. Astute neurologic assessment skills and immediate and appropriate interventions are required to maintain the patient’s functional status. This article provides an overview of the treatment of GBM and reviews how oncology nurses can intervene to positively improve the quality of life of patients and their families.

At a Glance
- Glioblastoma multiforme is a rare cancer with a poor prognosis.
- Treatment is multimodal, using surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, and targeted therapies, with the overall goal of extending survival while maintaining quality of life.
- Nursing interventions designed to address the unique supportive care needs of this population can positively impact patients and their families.

Clinical Presentation
Clinical presentation of glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) varies depending on the location of the tumor and the anatomic structures of the involved brain (Lobera, 2009). The most common symptoms at presentation are headache, seizure, motor weakness, and progressive neurologic deficit (Brandes et al., 2008). These symptoms typically develop over days.

Mary Elizabeth Davis, RN, MSN, AOCNS®, is a clinical nurse specialist in the Department of Ambulatory Nursing, and Ann Marie Mulligan Stoiber, RN, BSN, OCN®, is a clinical nurse IV in the Department of Neurology, both at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, NY. Davis is a member of Genentech’s Nursing Advisory Board for Nursing and Patient Education Materials. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article. The authors did not receive honoraria for this work. The content of this article has been reviewed by independent peer reviewers to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the independent peer reviewers or editorial staff. Mention of specific products and opinions related to those products do not indicate or imply endorsement by the Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing or the Oncology Nursing Society. (Submitted July 2010. Revision submitted September 2010. Accepted for publication October 3, 2010.)

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/11.CJON.291-297