Diarrhea caused by chemotherapy or radiation in patients with cancer can cause dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, malnutrition, fluid depletion, and hospitalization. In severe cases, uncontrolled diarrhea can lead to therapy dose reductions or even death. Oncology professionals may simply assess for the absence or presence of diarrhea, rather than using a standard assessment tool; they also may lack awareness regarding availability of established assessment and treatment guidelines. However, use of treatment guidelines can lead to optimal prevention and management of treatment-induced diarrhea in patients with cancer. Oncology nurses play a key role in the identification and treatment of chemotherapy- and radiation therapy-induced diarrhea.

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Oncology nurses play a key role in the identification and treatment of chemotherapy- and radiation therapy-induced diarrhea. Despite the common occurrence of these conditions, many nurses lack awareness regarding the availability of established assessment and treatment guidelines. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to describe treatment-related diarrhea, and to examine the current treatment guidelines for diarrhea associated with chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

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Nutritional Management

Dietary modifications commonly are implemented to stop or lessen the severity of cancer treatment-related diarrhea (Arbuckle, Huber, & Zacker, 2000). Each...