Patients’ Experiences of Preparation for Radiation Therapy: A Qualitative Study

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Radiation therapy is one of the three major cancer treatment modalities (Tait & Hardy, 2006), with about 50% of all patients with cancer recommended to receive it (Barton et al., 2013). Radiation therapy is used to treat cancer itself (curative) or to relieve symptoms (palliative). For many, curative radiation therapy is a time-intensive treatment, which is often undergone five days per week for as many as eight weeks (New South Wales [NSW] Department of Health, 2010). Palliative radiation therapy usually involves fewer treatments given during a specified time. Although the physical and psychological impacts of radiation therapy can vary, short-term effects commonly include skin changes and fatigue, and long-term side effects include secondary tumors, cognitive impairment, or infertility, depending on the site and dose of treatment. Poor psychological outcomes, such as anxiety and depression, are also common among people receiving radiation therapy (Hess & Chen, 2014; Reilly et al., 2013).