The Role of Oncology Nurses in the Care of Adults With Sickle Cell Disease

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Oncology nurses are experts in pain management, and pain is the hallmark of sickle cell disease (SCD). Because individuals with cancer and individuals with SCD often receive care from hematologists or oncologists and are admitted to the same nursing units, oncology nurses need to have an understanding of SCD and the challenges that these individuals face.

Oncology nurses most often care for patients who are admitted for oncologic or malignant hematologic disorders. As a result of the disorder and treatment, pain is a significant symptom for many of these patients. Oncology nurses are experts in pain assessment and pain management. For that reason, other populations that experience pain as a significant symptom of their disease may benefit from the pain management skills of oncology nurses. One such population is individuals with sickle cell disease (SCD), a noncancerous hematologic disorder.

Pain is the hallmark symptom of SCD. Individuals with cancer and those living with SCD often receive care from hematologists and oncologists and may be admitted to the same unit. Therefore, oncology nurses need to have an understanding of the care of individuals with SCD and the challenges they face with a chronic disease. The purposes of this article are to provide a brief overview of SCD, compare the pain of SCD and cancer, and provide suggestions on the role oncology nurses can have in the management of hospitalized individuals with SCD.

Overview of Sickle Cell Disease

SCD refers to a group of inherited conditions in which a gene mutation causes the hemoglobin to assume a sickle shape, promoting vaso-occlusion and leading to both acute and chronic vascular inflammation (Ballas et al., 2012). The hallmark of the disease is pain caused by vaso-occlusion, reperfusion injury, and hypoxemia (Rees, Williams, & Gladwin, 2010).

Transition in the Delivery of Care

Introduced in 1996, hospitalists are physicians, nurse practitioners, or physician assistants who specialize in delivering comprehensive medical care to hospitalized patients and have become one of the dominant groups of healthcare providers of inpatient care in North American hospitals (Kuo & Goodwin, 2011). Patients who are defined as unattached or who have primary physicians who do not...