Substance Abuse and Addiction

Implications for pain management in patients with cancer

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BACKGROUND: Substance use disorders (SUDs) are chronic diseases that may complicate the nursing care of patients with cancer, affecting their ability to adhere to treatment protocols, responses to cancer pain, and use of opioids for analgesia.

OBJECTIVES: This article explores how the presence of an SUD may affect oncology nursing care and pain management.

METHODS: The PubMed and CINAHL® databases were searched for articles from 1980–2016 using the keywords cancer, cancer pain, addiction, substance abuse, and alcoholism.

FINDINGS: SUD is a common comorbidity in patients with cancer that may play a role in disease etiology. Practice guidelines are suggested for the assessment and management of addiction to improve overall outcomes for patients. Effective treatments for SUDs and cancer pain exist, and recovery can lead to improvements in multiple aspects of patients’ lives.

KEYWORDS
pain; substance use disorder; opioids; abuse; addiction

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Substance Use Disorders

About 9% of Americans meet the diagnostic criteria for an SUD (6% for alcohol and 3% for illicit drugs), making it one of the most common chronic diseases in the United States (SAMHSA, 2015). The health consequences of an SUD (including organ damage, infections, motor vehicle accidents, and mental illness) are mirrored by social effects of the disease, such as crime, violence (including domestic violence and child abuse), incarceration, and