Preserving Oneself in the Face of Uncertainty: A Grounded Theory Study of Women With Ovarian Cancer

Rachel A. Pozzar, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, and Donna L. Berry, PhD, RN, FAAN, AOCN®

PURPOSE: To describe the cancer care process as it is perceived by women with ovarian cancer.

PARTICIPANTS & SETTING: 18 English-speaking adult women with ovarian cancer were recruited from an advocacy organization for patients with ovarian cancer and the gynecologic oncology clinic at a community-based teaching hospital in Burlington, Massachusetts.

METHODOLOGIC APPROACH: A grounded theory approach was used. Data were collected via individual interviews with participants.

FINDINGS: An overarching theme of preserving oneself in the face of uncertainty was described by the participants. Trajectories from prediagnosis to treatment were influenced by the quality of patient–provider communication, support from significant others, and self-concept aspects.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Comprehensive care that validates patient concerns and supports information exchange is essential. Nurses can promote the physical and psychological well-being of women with ovarian cancer by identifying institutional and community-based resources for support and specialty care.

Ovarian cancer is the deadliest gynecologic malignancy and the fifth leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women living in the United States (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2018). The overall five-year relative survival rate for ovarian cancer is 47%, which drops to only 29% for women who are diagnosed with late-stage disease (ACS, 2018). Although the development of novel cancer therapies, such as poly adenosine diphosphate ribose polymerase (PARP) inhibitors and immunotherapy, has been promising (Nelson & Jazaeri, 2017; Pujade-Lauraine, 2017), research indicates that the majority of women with ovarian cancer do not receive treatment in concordance with National Comprehensive Cancer Network guidelines (Champer et al., 2018; Warren et al., 2017). According to Bristow, Chang, Ziogas, and Anton-Culver (2013), guideline-concordant treatment is associated with improved overall survival rates for patients with cancer. Better understanding of the factors that influence the quality of ovarian cancer care can improve treatment and outcomes for patients and ensure that patients are receiving the maximum benefit from novel therapies.

In a systematic review of the determinants of guideline-concordant treatment of ovarian cancer, Pozzar and Berry (2017) determined that the majority of research on this topic has focused on identifying relationships between sociodemographic or clinical factors and care quality. Conversely, several studies have highlighted the need to explore patient, provider, and caregiver perspectives on decision making for ovarian cancer treatment (Pozzar, Baldwin, Goff, & Berry, 2018; Warren et al., 2017). Although several studies of women’s experiences living with ovarian cancer have been done (Burles & Holtslander, 2013; Ekwall, Ternestedt, Sorbe, & Sunvisson, 2014; Howell, Fitch, & Deane, 2003), women’s perceptions of the

KEYWORDS ovarian cancer; self-concept; decision making; patient-centered care
ONF. 46(5), 595–603.
DOI 10.1188/19.ONF.595-603