It Is Time to Ask About Financial Toxicity

Increasing attention in the oncology community has turned to the problem of financial toxicity, a term coined to reflect the significant negative impact that high medical costs combined with income interruption during treatment may cause (Katz, 2018; Zafar & Abernethy, 2013). Numerous studies have described how widespread the problem is, affecting as many as 73% of patients with cancer (Gordon, Merollini, Lowe, & Chan, 2017), and its association with negative outcomes, such as decreased health-related quality of life, unplanned and unwanted lifestyle changes because of lack of funds, and intentional nonadherence to planned therapy in an attempt to decrease out-of-pocket costs (Zafar, 2015). Several articles describe brief screening tools, such as the Distress Thermometer (National Comprehensive Cancer Network, n.d.), and psychometrically tested assessment instruments, like the Comprehensive Score for Financial Toxicity (de Souza et al., 2014), that are potentially suitable to incorporate into routine clinical practice. However, there are very few tested interventions for financial toxicity, despite the recognized need for evidence-based practice in this area.

The development of this supplement was guided by the need to assist the practicing clinical nurse to support patients facing mounting healthcare costs while receiving treatment for cancer. Thomas, Hughes, Mady, and Belcher (2019) review existing knowledge on financial toxicity and propose a conceptual model that incorporates clinical and sociodemographic risk factors; financial and biologic coping responses; and physical, psychosocial, and treatment-related outcomes associated with financial toxicity. Different healthcare roles and models for providing financial support, including the development of the financial navigator specialist position, toward the design of practical, real-time interventions to relieve financial (and associated psychosocial) suffering. A common theme throughout this supplement is the need for clinical nurses in any role.

"Relationships between financial toxicity and psychosocial symptoms, as well as worsened physical symptoms, are starting to be explored."