The purpose of this literature review is to explore the historical progression of treatment and its impact on care requisites in patients with head and neck cancer. Head and neck cancers are some of the most visible types of cancer. Patients often experience difficulties in self-care because of problems adapting to and coping with the diagnosis and disease management. Evaluation of the literature from the 1960s to present indicated a shift from coping with disfigurement to focusing on dysfunction and rehabilitative self-care. The process of assisting patients with self-care activities occurs from the time of diagnosis through post-treatment and beyond. Adapting to and coping with changes in physical appearance and function begins with the cognitive decision to initiate treatment modalities specific to the cancer site. Current knowledge of the manifestations of head and neck cancer provides the healthcare team with a better understanding of the disease trajectory and how best to assist patients in adapting to and coping with changes affecting their quality of life.