Psychosocial Predictors of Depression Among Older African American Patients With Cancer

Jill B. Hamilton, PhD, Allison M. Deal, MS, LTC Angelo D. Moore, PhD, Nakia C. Best, MSN, Kayoll V. Galbraith, BSN, and Hyman Muss, MD

Depression is a significant health concern, affecting an estimated 15%–25% of all patients with cancer (Chen et al., 2011; Reyes-Gibby et al., 2012). Depression particularly is a concern among older patients and survivors (Nelson et al., 2009; Perkins et al., 2007), those with a low socioeconomic status (Lo et al., 2010), and those with severe cancer treatment-related symptoms (Boyd et al., 2012). Generally, patients with cancer in depressed moods are less likely to participate in treatment decisions (Block, 2010) or seek out social support (Kleiboer et al., 2011) and more likely to have declines in physical functioning during treatment, drop out of treatment (Wells et al., 2011), and have shorter survival times (Chen et al., 2011) than those patients who are not depressed.

Compared to Caucasians, older African American patients with cancer are more likely to have advanced-stage cancers, more comorbidities, and functional limitations, placing them at higher risk for depressive moods (Zhang et al., 2012). Social factors also may increase the risk of depression among older African American patients with cancer, as they are more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to live below the poverty level, lack private health insurance, and have less than a high school education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Older African Americans are more likely to be employed in the service sector (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010); therefore, they are more vulnerable to job losses and extended layoffs. Depression among older African American patients with cancer also may be influenced by a reluctance to express emotional distress to family members, engage in support groups with other cancer survivors (Gullatte et al., 2006), and seek mental health care (Poussaint & Alexander, 2000). Regardless of ethnicity, undetected and untreated clinical depression has been linked to poor treatment adherence (Adler & Page, 2008; Fann et al., 2009) and a poor quality of life (Kroenke et al., 2010) in patients with cancer. Evidence to date suggests that, among patients with cancer, older African Americans...