A Look at the Problem of Falls Among People With Cancer

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Many people with cancer have multiple risk factors for falls, such as older age, diminished functional status, neurologic and nutritional deficits as a result of cancer treatments, polypharmacy, and deconditioning related to cancer-related fatigue (Dean et al., 1995; Holley, 2000; Holley & Borger, 2001; Kurtz, Kurtz, Given, & Given, 1993; Nail & King, 1987; Piper et al., 1989). People with cancer are achieving long-term periods of remission and survival and even are cured, making the quality of survivorship a central concern (American Cancer Society, 2001). Of all types of accidents, falls pose the most serious threat to the elderly. In addition to injuries, falls can have serious consequences related to reduced physical functioning and quality of life. A detailed understanding and awareness of the risk factors (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and problems associated with falls can assist oncology nurses to be vigilant in the identification of patients at high risk for falls. These patients may benefit from protocols used in other patient populations, new interventions, or the use of assistive devices.

People with cancer often have multiple risk factors for falls. A major risk factor is aging; because people often are diagnosed with cancer at an older age or are living longer with cancer, many are at risk for falls. Additional risk factors include impaired physical function, sensory-neurologic deficits, use of multiple medications, and de-conditioning, often caused by treatment-induced fatigue. Of all types of accidents, falls pose the most serious threat to the elderly. Fall injuries can have serious consequences related to reduced physical functioning and quality of life. A detailed understanding and awareness of the risk factors (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and problems associated with falls can assist oncology nurses to be vigilant in the identification of patients at high risk for falls. These patients may benefit from protocols used in other patient populations, new interventions, or the use of assistive devices.

Intrinsic Factors of People Who Fall

Many researchers have attempted to identify people who are at risk of falling. Intrinsic (host) factors, such as older age, declining...