Patients experiencing cancer also can experience anxiety. Moderate to severe levels of anxiety can interfere with patients’ ability to concentrate and comprehend new information. The condition is particularly troublesome when trying to present educational material related to recommended treatment interventions. Patients’ understanding of the material is critical to ensure informed consent. Informed consent can be compromised if patients are unable to understand the information being provided. Nurses must be cognizant of the impact that anxiety has on patient education and assess patients prior to initiating patient teaching. By managing anxiety before beginning education, nurses can provide an environment more conducive to learning.

Before the Teaching Begins:
Managing Patient Anxiety Prior to Providing Education

Pamela L. Stephenson, RN, MSN, CS, AOCN®, CHPN

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Types of Anxiety

Several types of anxiety have been described, including reactive, preexisting, and anxiety related to drugs or medical conditions (Sivesind & Rohaly-Davis, 1998). Reactive anxiety, also known as situational or stress anxiety, is an acute form of anxiety that occurs in response to a stressor or traumatic event. Needle phobias or claustrophobia associated with magnetic

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Pamela L. Stephenson, RN, MSN, CS, AOCN®, CHPN, is a clinical nurse specialist of oncology at Forum Health’s Cancer CareCenters in Youngstown, OH. No significant financial relationship to disclose. (Submitted March 2004. Accepted for publication June 21, 2005.)