

# Cancer-Related Psychological Distress: A Concept Analysis

Amy Gundelach, RN, BSN, OCN®, and Barb Henry, DNP, APRN-BC



**Background:** Cancer-related psychological distress, as a concept, has limited research literature substantiation. Several studies report that patients with cancer suffer from significant psychological distress; however, the description of the concept of cancer-related psychological distress has not been clearly described. Theoretical work based on the concept is also unclear.

**Objectives:** This article is a report on the concept of cancer-related psychological distress to clarify the concept as separate from non-cancer-related psychological distress and promote the use of the term in nursing practice and research across the cancer trajectory.

**Methods:** This article used a content analysis to examine the literature. The literature review for this article used CINAHL®, PsycINFO®, and PubMed to search publications from 1999–2016.

**Findings:** Content analysis of the literature revealed that the term *psychological distress* was used often with regard to distress in patients with cancer, but the concept of *cancer-related psychological distress* was not clearly defined. Four attributes encompass the concept of cancer-related psychological distress: depression, anxiety, fear, and feeling discouraged. The primary antecedent to the concept is the cancer diagnosis. The consequences can be positive or negative.

Amy Gundelach, RN, BSN, OCN®, is an infusion nurse at the University of New Mexico Hospital in Albuquerque and a student in the Adult-Gerontology Clinical Nurse Specialist With Oncology Specialty program in the School of Nursing at Loyola University Chicago in Illinois; and Barb Henry, DNP, APRN-BC, is a psychiatric advanced practice RN at Melvin S. Gale, MD, and Associates in Cincinnati, OH. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article. The authors were participants in the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing* Writing Mentorship Program. The content of this article has been reviewed by independent peer reviewers to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the authors, planners, independent peer reviewers, or editorial staff. Gundelach can be reached at agundelach@salud.unm.edu, with copy to editor at CJONEditor@ons.org. (Submitted July 2015. Revision submitted January 2016. Accepted for publication February 4, 2016.)

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Patients with cancer are prone to psychological distress related to the cancer diagnosis (Holland & Alici, 2010). *Psychological distress* is a general term used to describe negative feelings or emotions that affect one's level of functioning and interfere with activities of daily living (Ridner, 2004). Psychological distress can result in distorted views of the self and circumstances and is manifested by sadness, anxiety, distraction, and symptoms of mental illness (Ridner, 2004). When a person has cancer, psychological distress can affect finances, family, sexuality, spirituality, and many other aspects of life. Patients living within five years of a cancer diagnosis are shown to need more attention to changes in functioning, including psychological distress (Harding, 2012). This distress may lead to major psychiatric illness; however, more commonly, the patient experiences symptoms of depression or anxiety as a consequence of having cancer. Nurses must recognize and assess for psy-

chological distress in patients, as well as provide appropriate interventions. Nurses who pair clinical care of patients with psychosocial interventions provide an avenue for holistic focus on each patient. The purpose of this article is to define and describe the term *cancer-related psychological distress* as a person's negative emotional response to a cancer diagnosis.

## Methods

A literature review of CINAHL®, PsycINFO®, and PubMed databases was conducted to search publications from 1999–2016 using the key words *psychological distress*, *cancer or neoplasm*, *stress*, *nursing*, and *concept analysis*. The search was then refined using the following filters: publications from 2011–2016, participants aged 18 years or older, and publications written in the English language. Twenty-four articles were reviewed for potential use in the concept