Alcohol Use Assessment in Young Adult Cancer Survivors

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Purpose/Objectives: To determine whether oncology practitioners assess for alcohol consumption rates and usage patterns among young adult cancer survivors, and to determine drinking patterns and frequency of alcoholic beverage consumption among young adult cancer survivors.

Design: Retrospective chart review.

Setting: Two outpatient cancer clinics.

Sample: 77 young adult survivors of childhood cancer aged 18–30 years.

Methods: Charts were selected from June to December 2009 and data were extracted using a structured questionnaire.

Main Research Variables: Oncology practitioner assessment of alcohol use and alcohol consumption of young adult cancer survivors.

Findings: Alcohol screening was conducted for 48 participants. No significant differences were noted in most variables between those not screened for alcohol use and those screened for alcohol use. Of the 48 screened for alcohol use, 30 reported “no use.” For the 18 who reported alcohol use, the terms used to describe the frequency varied and were vague.

Conclusions: The key finding of the study was that screening and documentation of alcohol consumption was poorly and inconsistently performed in the authors’ sample of young adult cancer survivors.

Implications for Nursing: Similar to healthy young adults aged 18–30 years, young adult cancer survivors are at a developmental age where it is likely they will engage in unhealthy drinking; therefore, they should be screened for alcohol use and binge drinking. Practitioners can incorporate simple, short questions into health assessment visits that allow them to screen for unhealthy alcohol use.

Key Words: alcohol consumption; young adult cancer survivors; screening