The literature on fatigue in patients with cancer has expanded dramatically since 1980, with most of the growth concentrated from 1996–2001. Despite the increase in the number of published papers on fatigue, several important questions about this troublesome sensation remain unanswered. This article will provide a historic perspective on the generation of knowledge about fatigue in patients with cancer, review what is known, define gaps in knowledge, and recommend approaches to practice, policy, and professional education.

Background

The first research reports on fatigue in patients with cancer appeared in the late 1970s (Haylock & Hart, 1979). Interest in the topic was rekindled in the mid-1980s with the publication of Piper’s conceptualization of etiologic factors for fatigue of Piper’s conceptualization of etiologic factors for fatigue.