Cancer-Related Pain Assessment

Monitoring the effectiveness of interventions

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BACKGROUND: Cancer-related pain is a major health problem because of its magnitude, the subjective nature of the pain experience, and the complexity of the disease, making it difficult to assess and control. When assessment is not performed, poor pain control can result.

OBJECTIVES: This article provides an overview of the components of a comprehensive cancer pain assessment.

METHODS: A review of the healthcare literature was performed.

FINDINGS: Nurses play a key role in pain assessment by establishing patient trust and rapport, which helps to break down barriers that may stand in the way of effective pain assessment and management.

ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL OF CANCER-RELATED PAIN is difficult because of its magnitude, the subjective nature of pain, and the complexity of the disease. The majority of patients with advanced disease have significant pain, and patients with cancer of the pancreas, bone, brain, lymphoma, lung, and head and neck have the highest prevalence (Breivik et al., 2009). Most pain results from the underlying cancer (85%), secondary to antineoplastic therapies (17%), and comorbidities unrelated to cancer (9%) (Breivik et al., 2009). If cancer-related pain is present, a comprehensive pain assessment is critical for successful treatment of the pain. However, assessment can be challenging because of the subjective nature of pain and the time required for thorough assessment.

When assessment is not performed or not done well, poor pain control can result. A comprehensive pain assessment is particularly important when the desired goals are finding the cause of the pain, identifying optimal therapies, and achieving better pain control for the patient during a period of time (National Comprehensive Cancer Network [NCCN], 2016). A key component of cancer pain assessment is soliciting critical information from the patient and using that information to monitor relief when various interventions are employed. All patients with cancer should be screened for pain at regular intervals. Screening for pain involves assessing if the patient is experiencing pain. If pain is present, a comprehensive pain assessment should be performed.

KEYWORDS cancer-related pain; assessment; verbal and nonverbal patients; management

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