Symptom Clusters in Elderly Patients With Lung Cancer

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Purpose/Objectives: To identify the number, type, and combination (cluster) of symptoms experienced by patients with lung cancer.

Design: A secondary analysis of data collected as part of a larger study.

Setting: 24 sites that included community hospitals, medical clinics, oncology clinics, and radiation-oncology clinics.

Sample: 220 patients newly diagnosed with lung cancer, ranging in age from 65–89 years (X = 72 years, SD = 5.02), 38% with early-stage and 62% with late-stage lung cancer.

Methods: Subject self-report.

Findings: Factor analysis found that the symptoms of fatigue, nausea, weakness, appetite loss, weight loss, altered taste, and vomiting form a cluster. Initial staging of cancer, the number of comorbid conditions, and being treated with chemotherapy emerged as significant predictors of the symptoms reported. Few differences were noted between men and women. Correlation was found among the numbers of symptoms reported, symptom severity, and limitations attributed to symptoms.

Conclusions: Patients with lung cancer report multiple distressing symptoms related to symptom severity and limitations.

Implications for Nursing: Assessment of multiple symptoms is recommended in patients with lung cancer.

Key Points . . .

➤ Patients with lung cancer experience multiple symptoms.
➤ Fatigue, nausea, weakness, appetite loss, weight loss, altered taste, and vomiting form a cluster of common symptoms in patients with lung cancer at the time of diagnosis.
➤ Patients with more advanced lung cancer and more comorbidities at the time of diagnosis who are treated with chemotherapy are most likely to have multiple symptoms.
➤ The more symptoms a patient has, the more severe and limiting the symptoms are perceived to be.

Goal for CE Enrollees:
To further enhance nurses’ knowledge regarding the number, type, and combination (cluster) of symptoms experienced by patients with lung cancer.

Objectives for CE Enrollees:
On completion of this CE, the participant will be able to
1. Identify the number, type, and combination (cluster) of symptoms experienced by patients with lung cancer.
2. Describe the relationships among symptoms reported, demographic variables, disease characteristics, and perceived level of functioning.

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