Prospetive Assessment of Fatigue and Health Status in Greek Patients With Breast Cancer Undergoing Adjuvant Radiotherapy

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Fatigue is the most prevalent symptom in patients with cancer (Graydon, Bubela, Irvine, & Vincent, 1995; Mock, 2003; Winningham et al., 1994), affecting 70%–95% of patients receiving chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or biotherapy (Jacobsen et al., 1999; Mock). It remains a disruptive symptom in 17%–40% of disease-free cancer survivors (Bower et al., 2000; Broeckel, Jacobsen, Horton, Balducci, & Lyman, 1998; Mock) and affects 85%–100% of patients in palliative care (Mock). Fatigue interferes with usual functioning and can disturb mood, concentration, perception, capacity to work, compliance with medical treatment, and the ability to perform usual daily activities (Irvine, Vincent, Graydon, Bubela, & Thompson, 1994; Mock).

Key Points . . .

➤ Radiotherapy is an independent factor that increases fatigue in patients with breast cancer receiving adjuvant treatment.
➤ Radiotherapy-induced fatigue significantly compromises the overall health status of patients with breast cancer.
➤ Fatigue in patients with cancer is a universal phenomenon, and research can focus on identifying patterns of treatment-related fatigue.
➤ Similar to nurses in other countries, Greek nurses should assess fatigue and implement appropriate interventions to help patients with symptom management.

More than 200,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006 in the United States, and although advances in diagnosis and treatment have reduced mortality rates, the disease remains the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women (American Cancer Society, 2006). In Greece, approximately 1,500 women are newly diagnosed with breast cancer every year, and an estimated 28% of annual female mortality is attributed to cancer, with breast cancer being one of the primary causes (Tountas, 2001).

Treatment protocols used in Greek patients with breast cancer are similar to those used in the United States. Radiotherapy is