Breast cancer is the most commonly occurring cancer in women; one in eight women in the United States will develop the disease in her lifetime (American Cancer Society, 2007). Metastatic disease may be detected at the time of initial diagnosis or any time after initial diagnosis. Approximately 15% of women diagnosed will have metastatic disease at the time of diagnosis, and as many as 30% of the remaining cases will involve metastatic relapse (Vogel, 2000). Most women with metastatic breast disease are candidates for treatment with aggressive chemotherapy protocols that have many adverse side effects.

Patients often experience a wide variety of unpleasant symptoms related to disease progression and treatment choices affecting their quality of life (QOL) and ability to function at multiple levels (Goodwin et al., 2004). The role of oncology nurses includes identifying symptoms and providing interventions to maintain or improve the QOL of patients with cancer. Nurses should develop and explore appropriate, innovative interventions such as expressive writing to enhance or maintain QOL for women with stage IV metastatic breast cancer. Nursing, through research and clinical practice, has the opportunity to identify and expand the concept of writing interventions and to apply them in practice.

Disclosure and formation of narrative through expressive writing were linked to positive health outcomes in a model described by Pennebaker and colleagues (Graybeal, Sexton, & Pennebaker, 2002; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Disclosure is defined as the release of previously unshared or unexpressed thoughts and feelings, resulting in reduced psychological work of inhibition. Psychological work of inhibition is the subconscious effort to repress thoughts or emotions, which may result in physical, psychological, or social distress. Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) believed that translating distress into language helps people move beyond negative experiences. The theoretical background of disclosure began with description of a cathartic process, which reduced cumulative stress (Pennebaker & O’Heeron, 1984). More than a cathartic experience, disclosure in the Pennebaker model uses concepts from psychoanalytic theory and employs the process of retelling an event or life issue with the intention of changing the teller’s perspective. The change in perspective facilitates...