Changes in Sexual Function on Mood and Quality of Life in Patients Undergoing Radiation Therapy for Prostate Cancer

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Purpose/Objectives: To describe the percentages of men with and without changes in sexual function from the beginning to end of radiation therapy and evaluate for differences in demographic and clinical characteristics, mood states, and quality of life (QOL) among patients who did and did not experience changes in sexual function.

Design: Descriptive, longitudinal.

Setting: Two radiation therapy departments in northern California.

Sample: 70 men with prostate cancer who underwent primary or adjuvant radiation therapy.

Methods: Self-report questionnaires, medical record reviews, and repeated measures analysis of variance.

Main Research Variables: Changes in sexual function; depression, anxiety, and QOL.

Findings: Patients were categorized into one of four sex groups (No Problem X 2, Problem–No Problem, No Problem–Problem, and Problem X 2) based on their responses to “Is your sexuality impacted by your illness?” at the beginning and end of radiation therapy. About 50% had a problem with sexual function either at the beginning or end of radiation therapy. Overall, men without sexual problems at both the beginning and end of radiation therapy had significantly less anxiety and depression and higher QOL scores than patients who developed a problem at the end and patients who had a problem at both time points.

Conclusions: Changes in sexual function during the course of radiation therapy affect patients’ mood and QOL.

Implications for Nursing: Clinicians should evaluate the effects of radiation therapy on sexual function and monitor patients with prostate cancer for depression and anxiety as well as for changes in QOL.