A Pilot Study of Relationships Among Pain Characteristics, Mood Disturbances, and Acculturation in a Community Sample of Chinese American Patients With Cancer

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Advances in cancer detection and therapy are extending the life expectancy of patients. However, cancer pain continues to be a persistent, disturbing, and often incapacitating symptom (Katz, 2002; Rahim-Williams et al., 2007; Spiegel, Sands, & Koopman, 1994; van den Beuken-van Everdingen et al., 2007; Wang et al., 1999). Although a number of cancer pain management guidelines have been developed (Gordon et al., 2005; Miaskowski et al., 2005; National Comprehensive Cancer Network, 2009), moderate to severe pain continues to be experienced by 30%–70% of patients undergoing cancer treatment and by up to 90% of patients with advanced disease (Portenoy & Lesage, 1999). In addition, cancer pain can have deleterious effects on patients’ quality of life (Katz, 2002; Lin, Lai, & Ward, 2003; Miaskowski & Dibble, 1995; Miaskowski & Lee, 1999; Rustoen, Moun, Padilla, Paul, & Miaskowski, 2005) and often is associated with anxiety and depression (McDaniel, Mussleman, Porter, Reed, & Nemeroff, 1995; Mystakidou et al., 2006).

Cancer pain is multidimensional and includes physiological, sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and sociocultural components (McGuire, 1995). Cultural beliefs and practices can affect the way patients perceive and respond to pain, can influence their communication about pain, and can affect their healthcare decisions about pain (Calliaster, 2003; Kagawa-Singer, 1998). For example, Chen, Miaskowski, Dodd, and Pantilat (2008) noted that Chinese patients’ perceptions and management of cancer pain were influenced by the principles of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. A Taoist might believe that pain occurs if blood circulation (Qi) is blocked and that pain can be relieved by maintaining harmony with the universe. A Buddhist might believe that suffering (i.e., pain) can be relieved by following specifically defined right ways of life. A Confucian might believe that pain is an essential element in life that must be endured and reported only when it becomes unbearable. However, little empiric evidence is available on the relationships between levels of acculturation and pain in Chinese Americans.

Acculturation is a process by which immigrants adopt the values, beliefs, customs, norms, and lifestyle of the