Patterns of Fatigue in Adolescents Receiving Chemotherapy

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dolescents diagnosed with cancer represent a group of patients with a unique cancer epidemiology, development profile, and research needs. The population’s most common cancers include lymphoma, leukemia, central nervous system cancers, endocrine and germ cell tumors, and sarcomas—a spectrum of cancers different than that seen in adults or in younger children (Bleyer, Viny, & Barr, 2006). Adolescents face cancer and receive treatment at a time in life that is full of physical, social, and psychological growth that determines future careers, lifestyles, and relationships. These circumstances result in cancer treatment and symptom experiences for adolescents that are not likely to reflect those of younger children or adult patients. Age-specific research, therefore, is required to determine tailored disease and symptom-management strategies for these vulnerable adolescents with cancer.

Cancer-related fatigue is one of the most frequent symptoms reported by adolescents and rated as one of the most distressing (Gibson et al., 2005; Hedstrom, Ljungman, & von Essen, 2005; Hockenberry-Eaton et al., 1998; Ream et al., 2006). Compared to children, adolescents are more aware of the combined physical and mental aspects of fatigue as well as more contributing and alleviating factors (Hinds et al., 1999). Fatigue adds a burden to adolescents’ abilities to participate in usual activities and affects their mood and quality of life (Davies, Whitsett, Bruce, & McCarthy, 2002; Gibson et al., 2005; Meeske, Katz, Palmer, Burwinkle, & Varni, 2004; Woodgate, 2005). Although fatigue may be most disruptive to adolescents during cancer treatment, studies show that fatigue can persist as adolescents complete their treatment and mature into young adults, affecting social and career outcomes (Edwards, Gibson, Richardson, Sepion, & Ream, 2003; Langeveld, Ubbink, & Smetz, 2000; Ng et al., 2005; Ream et al., 2006).