A Pilot Study of Activity Engagement in the First Six Months After Stem Cell Transplantation

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stem cell transplantation (SCT) is standard therapy for many hematologic cancers, and more than 17,000 SCTs are performed each year in the United States (Goldman & Ausiello, 2008). Although SCT survivors generally report high global quality of life, their social and physical functioning is lower than that of age-matched peers (Bieri et al., 2008; Kopp et al., 2005; Pidala, Anasetti, & Jim, 2009; Wettergren, Sprangers, Bjorkholm, & Langius-Eklof, 2008). Most survivors experience fatigue during the first year after transplantation (Larsen, Nordstrom, Ljungman, & Gardulf, 2007), which can affect physical functioning, returning to work, and usual activities (Harder et al., 2002). Although most SCT survivors eventually return to school or work and resume their household activities, some survivors are unable to do so (Mosher, Redd, Rini, Burkhalter, & DuHamel, 2009).

The ability to resume previous activities and levels of activity engagement is one intuitively plausible indicator of the success of the procedure. Baker, Curbow, and Wingard (1991) found that SCT survivors who were able to retain their valued roles (e.g., worker, home maintainer, friend) had higher quality of life than survivors who reported loss of valued roles. Lee et al. (2001) similarly asked participants to assess the degree to which they were able to return to their previous lifestyles and enjoy their normal activities as a way to measure patient-centered outcomes of SCT. They found that at six months after transplantation, 53% of the autologous transplantation recipients agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “life has returned to normal” and 42% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I have been able to enjoy my normal activities” since transplantation. Significantly fewer recipients of allogeneic transplants endorsed the statements (31% and 21%, respectively). Differences between allogeneic and autologous transplantation recipients had equalized at 12 months, yet about 33% of both samples did not endorse the statements of recovery at that time point. Lee et al. (2001) concluded that, although their data contained many encouraging reports of recovery, such as few reports of bothersome symptoms, a substantial proportion of participants did not feel that their lives, routines, and activities had returned to normal one year after transplantation.