Gender Differences in Quality of Life Among Long-Term Colorectal Cancer Survivors With Ostomies

Marcia Grant, RN, DNSc, FAAN, Carmit K. McMullen, PhD, Andrea Altschuler, PhD, M. Jane Mohler, MPH, PhD, Mark C. Hornbrook, PhD, Lisa J. Herrinton, PhD, Christopher S. Wendel, MS, Carol M. Baldwin, PhD, RN, CHTP, AHN-BC, FAAN, and Robert S. Krouse, MD, FACS

Colorectal cancer (CRC) accounts for more than 9% of all new cancer cases, and it has the third most frequent incidence rate for cancer in the United States (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2011). Survival rates at one year and five years are 83% and 65%, respectively (ACS, 2011). An estimated 18%–35% of the 1.1 million people alive in the United States with a history of CRC (Mariotto, Yabroff, Feuer, De Angelis, & Brown, 2006), particularly those with low-rectal cancers, have received temporary or permanent intestinal stomas (ostomies) (Gastinger et al., 2005; Jess, Christiansen, & Bech, 2002; Schmidt, Bestmann, Küchler, Longo, & Kremer, 2005).

Studies have found that CRC survivors, particularly women and those with ostomies, have persistent deficits in their health-related quality of life (HRQOL) (Krouse et al., 2009; Nugent, Daniels, Stewart, Patankar, & Brown, 2006), particularly those with low-rectal cancers, have received temporary or permanent intestinal stomas (ostomies) (Gastinger et al., 2005; Jess, Christiansen, & Bech, 2002; Schmidt, Bestmann, Küchler, Longo, & Kremer, 2005).

Methods: Eight focus groups discussed the challenges of living with an ostomy. Content was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using directive and summative content analysis.

Findings: All groups reported avoiding foods that cause gas or rapid transit and discussed how limiting the amount of food eaten controlled the output. All groups discussed physical activities, getting support from friends and family, and the importance of being resilient. Both genders identified challenges with sexuality and intimacy. Coping and adjustment difficulties mostly were discussed by women, with men only discussing these issues to a small extent. Difficulties with sleep primarily were identified by women with low HRQOL. Problems with body image and depression were discussed only by women with low HRQOL.

Conclusions: Common issues included diet management, physical activity, social support, and sexuality. Although both genders identified challenges, women described more specific psychological and social issues than men.

Implications for Nursing: Application of these gender-based differences can inform educational interventions for colorectal cancer survivors with ostomies.