Fatigue in Young Survivors of Extracranial Childhood Cancer: A Finnish Nationwide Survey

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Although an increasing number of young patients with cancer are being successfully treated for their disease (Gatta et al., 2009), demanding treatment regimens may be having a negative impact on this population’s health-related quality of life (HRQOL). The literature has focused on describing the HRQOL of young cancer survivors; however, fatigue usually is overlooked in favor of more obvious late effects of cancer and treatment (Hockenberry-Eaton et al., 1998). Previous reports have shown that fatigue can cause negative changes in HRQOL (Eddy & Cruz, 2007; Meeske, Katz, Palmer, Burnwinkle, & Varni, 2004; Meeske, Patel, Palmer, Nelson, & Parow, 2007; Varni, Burwinkle, Katz, Meeske, & Dickinson, 2002). Fatigue is a symptom that may affect a patient’s life, both in the short and long term. Despite the fact that significantly less is known about cancer-related fatigue in children and adolescents than in adults (Whitsett, Gudmundsdottir, Davies, McCarthy, & Friedman, 2008), fatigue is recognized as a significant symptom experienced by children and adolescents with cancer (Gibson, Garnett, Richardson, Edwards, & Sepion, 2005; Meeske et al., 2004; Ruland, Hamilton, & Schjodt-Osmo, 2009; Whitsett et al., 2008). Minimal data are available concerning fatigue in these populations, but Varni et al. (2002) identified that young cancer survivors are more fatigued than their healthy control counterparts.

No shared understanding of the definition and meaning of fatigue exists for these young patients and survivors. As a whole, fatigue is a difficult concept to explain. The first study to evaluate fatigue in children with cancer (Hockenberry-Eaton et al., 1998) reported that the definition of fatigue varies depending on the developmental level of the participants. Another study (Hinds et al., 1999) reported that the patient, parents, and staff each defined fatigue differently. Children reporting fatigue noted increased levels of depressed mood and different physical consequences; adolescents emphasized the dynamic sensation of physical or mental exhaustion. Parents defined fatigue as a state of...