Health-Promotion Behaviors and Psychological Distress in Cancer Survivors

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The United States has more than 11 million cancer survivors, representing 4% of the population. That number has grown every year since the early 1980s; to date, about 68% of patients with cancer are expected to live at least five years after diagnosis (American Cancer Society, 2012). The increase in number of survivors is probably caused by multiple factors, including improved early detection and treatment of certain cancers. That figure should grow dramatically with the aging of the U.S. population.

With the increase in the number of survivors, interest is growing in the long-term physical and psychological effects of cancer treatment on cancer survivors and their families. Compared to the general population, cancer survivors are more likely to report lower general health, accelerated functional declines, and increased psychological distress (Demark-Wahnefried, Morey, Sloane, Snyder, & Cohen, 2009; Fairley, Hawk, & Pierre, 2010; Foster, Wright, Hill, Hopkinson, & Roffe, 2009; Helgesson, Lissner, Mansson, & Bengtsson, 2007; Hewitt, Greenfield, & Stovall, 2005; Richardson, Wingo, Zack, Zahrani, & King, 2007). Changing behavior during survivorship can be important in achieving the highest possible level of health and can play a critical role in one’s adaptation after cancer (Kohno et al., 2010). As a result, the current study was undertaken to explore the relationship between engaging in health-promotion behaviors believed to affect the achievement of optimal health and the experience of psychosocial distress in cancer survivors.

Literature Review

Although achieving survivorship is considered a victory over cancer, the effect of cancer and its treatment is significant and associated with several long-term health...