Health-Seeking Behaviors and Sexuality in Rectal Cancer Survivors in Taiwan: Associations With Spirituality and Resourcefulness

Tsay-Yi Au, PhD, RN, Jaclene A. Zauszniewski, PhD, RN-BC, FAAN, and Tai-Ming King, MD, MBA

Rectal cancer survival in Taiwan has greatly increased from a 51% five-year survival rate in 1997 to a 56% in 2011 (Taiwan Department of Health, 2011) because of screening and early detection, as well as innovation in treatment. However, adverse effects on sexuality for rectal cancer survivors remain an important issue (Au, Zauszniewski, & King, 2011). Living with a chronic illness and experiencing sexual dysfunction can produce overwhelming stress and further compromise an individual’s physical and psychological health and well-being. Literature has shown that patients with cancer are more likely to abandon sexual activity than their healthy partners because they are emotionally and psychologically unprepared (Andersen & van der Does, 1994). For patients with cancer, sexuality may have special significance of life and vitality, and experiencing cancer and its treatment may cause them to reassess their meaning of living (Rice, 2000).

Spirituality is perceived as an important dimension in helping people reach their sexual potential (Helminjak, 1998), and resourcefulness is a learned collection of cognitive-behavioral skills that are important to assist individuals in coping with stressful situations, which may have an impact on their well-being (Zauszniewski, 2006). Spirituality and resourcefulness can be defined as an individual’s health-seeking behaviors (HSBs) for coping with stressful situations. Little is known about the effect of HSBs, such as spirituality and resourcefulness, and sexuality on patients with rectal cancer undergoing treatment. The goal of this analysis was to examine the relationships between those two HSBs and indicators of sexuality in this patient group (see Figure 1).

**Background**

Rectal cancer survivors’ sexuality often is overlooked or neglected in terms of quality of life (Au, Zauszniewski, Daly, Gary, & Deimling, 2010). Prior research in