Patterns of Symptoms Following Surgery for Esophageal Cancer

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Symptom management in oncology nursing includes the multiple symptoms that patients face following diagnosis and treatment. Research on these groups of symptoms is a priority for oncology nurses, and the evaluation of symptom patterns and clusters in oncology is emerging as a focus of study (Barsevick, 2007; Doorenbos et al., 2008). Surgical outcomes traditionally have been evaluated by objective measures such as morbidity, mortality, and complication rates, but subjective measures, such as symptoms and quality of life, are important clinical outcomes of interest and can serve as additional measures of patient outcome. Patients diagnosed with esophageal cancer experience prolonged and severe symptoms because of their disease and the effects of multimodality treatment (Donohoe, McGillycuddy, & Reynolds, 2011). Nursing research on symptoms in patients with esophageal cancer is limited and a need exists to identify and understand the pattern of symptoms patients experience before, during, and after surgical treatment.

Background and Significance

An estimated 17,460 new cases of esophageal cancer were diagnosed in the United States in 2012, with an estimated 15,070 deaths (Siegel, Naishadham, & Jemal, 2012). Esophageal cancer is the eighth most common cancer worldwide, ranking sixth among all cancers in mortality (Ferlay et al., 2010). A combination of chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery has been recommended for treatment (Urschel, Vasan, & Blewett, 2002); this multimodality treatment can offer an improved chance for a cure but is associated with persistent symptoms and a significant negative impact on lifestyle and quality of life (Sweed, Schiech, Barsevick, Babb, & Goldberg, 2002).

Symptom research has focused on single symptoms such as pain or fatigue (Dodd, Miaskowski, & Lee, 2004; Miaskowski, Dodd, & Lee, 2004), but more recent efforts have focused on groups of symptoms that occur together and are related to each other (Kim, McGuire, Tulman, & Barsevick, 2005). These groups of symptoms, termed symptom clusters, have been defined as groups...