

# Knowledge and Attitudes About Cancer Pain Management: A Comparison of Oncology and Nononcology Nurses

Patricia Rushton, RN, PhD, AOCN®, Dennis Eggett, PhD,  
and Carolyn W. Sutherland, MS, RN

**Purpose/Objectives:** To obtain information about the knowledge and attitudes of Utah nurses concerning cancer pain management.

**Design:** Descriptive study.

**Setting:** Nurses in Utah.

**Sample:** 44 oncology nurses and 303 nononcology nurses completed the study.

**Methods:** Ferrell's Nurses' Knowledge and Attitudes Survey Regarding Pain was given to oncology and nononcology nurses to compare knowledge and attitudes about treating cancer pain.

**Main Research Variables:** Knowledge and attitudes regarding cancer pain.

**Findings:** Attitudes of oncology nurses were more in line with recommended practices (principles) of cancer pain management than those of nononcology nurses. Oncology nurses had a better understanding of recommended practices (principles) of cancer pain management than nononcology nurses but still struggled with understanding the pharmacology of medications used to manage cancer pain.

**Conclusions:** Nurses do not use evidence-based practice in pain management consistently. Continuing education regarding cancer pain management remains important for oncology and nononcology nurses.

**Implications for Nursing:** Adoption of evidence-based practice requires ongoing education of nurses and support from nursing colleagues, nursing administration, and associated healthcare providers. Data from this study can be used to design a curriculum involving content about cancer pain management. All members of the healthcare team should be supported in practicing the correct principles of cancer pain management in actual practice.

## Key Points . . .

- Oncology nurses have a better grasp of cancer pain management principles than nononcology nurses.
- Education about principles of cancer pain management must be ongoing for all nurses.
- All members of the healthcare team should be supported in practicing correct principles of cancer pain management.

Ruzicka & Daniels, 2001; Spross, McGuire, & Schmitt, 1990), many patients continue to receive inadequate amounts of pain medication (Anderson et al., 2000; O'Brien et al.; Ruzicka & Daniels). In fact, the prevalence of pain in hospitalized patients with cancer has not decreased during the 1990s (Wells), even though pain relief is achievable in more than 90% of cases (Fox, 1982; Howell et al.; Joranson & Gilson; Paice et al.; Ruzicka & Daniels).

The *Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Cancer Pain* (Jacox et al., 1994), published by the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR), indicated that 75% of patients with advanced cancer experience pain at some point in their disease and 25% of these patients report their pain as severe. The AHCPR guidelines suggested

Pain is a symptom experienced frequently by patients with cancer (Ferrell, McCaffery, & Rhiner, 1992; Ferrell, McGuire, & Donovan, 1993; Holzheimer, McMillan, & Weitzner, 1999; O'Brien, Dalton, Konsler, & Carlson, 1996; Paice, Toy, & Shott, 1998; Pritchard, 1988; Wells, 2000) and is one of the symptoms that patients fear the most (Howell, Butler, Vincent, Watt-Watson, & Stearns, 2000; Myers, 1985). Despite new policies and guidelines for pain management published during the 1980s and 1990s (Joranson & Gilson, 1998; McCaffery & Ferrell, 1995;

*Patricia Rushton, RN, PhD, AOCN®, is an associate professor in the College of Nursing, Dennis Eggett, PhD, is director of the Center for Statistical Consultation and Collaborative Research in the Department of Statistics, and Carolyn W. Sutherland, MS, RN, is an instructor in the College of Nursing, all at Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City, UT. This project was funded by the College of Nursing at Brigham Young University. (Submitted March 2002. Accepted for publication December 17, 2002.)*

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