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Quality of Life in Cervical Cancer Survivors: A Review of the Literature and Directions for Future Research

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Cervical cancer is one of most prevalent types of cancer in women and is responsible for 471,000 annual cases worldwide (Cervical Cancer Statistics, 2007). Although a cancer diagnosis was once synonymous with death, 68% of adults diagnosed with cancer today can expect to be alive in five years (Jemal, Siegel, Xu, & Ward, 2010). As a result of widespread screening programs, the majority of cervical cancer cases are being diagnosed in the earlier stages. Because of this early detection, coupled with new and advanced medical treatment, women with cervical cancer now have relatively good five-year survival rates (more than 90% in developed countries [Fayed, 2006]). Some studies have even reported estimated five-year survival rates as high as 100% (Waggoner, 2003).

Given the increasing years of survivorship of women with cervical cancer, paying special attention to the impact of cancer and its treatment on quality of life (QOL) is necessary. The concept of QOL is particularly salient for nursing because nurses traditionally are concerned with the holistic perspective of patients, focusing on their survival and QOL (Ferrans, 2005). Consequently, nurses play important roles in maintaining the QOL of cervical cancer survivors.

A literature review of QOL in adult cancer survivors revealed that social support improves the psychological domain of QOL and that QOL varies according to the treatment received (Bloom, Petersen, & Kang, 2007). Although cancer survivors may share some common experiences, Bloom et al. (2007) did not provide detailed information about any experiences that are uniquely related to cervical cancer and its treatment. A review of QOL studies by Vistad, Fosså, and Dahl (2006) dealt specifically with long-term cervical cancer survivors, including relevant studies published from 1966–2005. Vistad et al. (2006) reported on the impact of cervical cancer survivorship on QOL, mainly in terms of the physical, psychosocial, and sexual sequelae.

Purpose/Objectives: To describe the most current trends in quality-of-life (QOL) research in cervical cancer survivors and to discuss directions for future research.

Data Sources: A literature search was conducted among five electronic databases using the terms *cervical* or *cervix cancer*, *quality of life*, *survivors*, *survivorship*, *measurement*, and *instruments*. Articles were published either in English or Chinese from January 2005 to June 2009.

Data Synthesis: Thirty-one articles were identified. The major QOL issues among cervical cancer survivors were categorized at the individual and systemic levels. The most current trends include research into the positive and negative aspects of cancer survivorship; studies that examine unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, which contribute to poor QOL; studies concerned with the impact of cervical cancer survivorship on male partners and family caregivers; and three primary types of instruments used for assessment.

Conclusions: Future research directions should include (a) exploring and optimizing the positive outcomes of cervical cancer survivorship, (b) using interventions to reduce risky lifestyles or unhealthy behaviors, (c) conducting exploratory studies to determine the impact of cervical cancer survivorship on families, (d) conducting longitudinal studies to document the ongoing changes in QOL among cervical cancer survivors, and (e) developing new instruments to assess the systemic level of QOL.

Implications for Nursing: Expanding the understanding of QOL and related factors in cervical cancer survivors would enable nurses to assess and develop interventions to improve QOL and overall survival outcomes for this population.

With a rapidly growing number of research studies that have examined QOL among cervical cancer survivors, a need exists to conduct an updated literature review to identify trends of research on the impact to QOL in female survivors. Therefore, the objectives of this review were to describe recent trends of QOL research in cervical cancer survivors and to discuss directions for additional research.