The Symptom Cluster of Fatigue, Pain, Anxiety, and Depression and the Effect on the Quality of Life of Women Receiving Treatment for Breast Cancer: A Multicenter Study

Winnie K.W. So, PhD, MHA, BN, RN, Gene Marsh, PhD, RN, W.M. Ling, BN, RN, F.Y. Leung, MSc, MBA, BN, RN, Joe C.K. Lo, PDG(HSM), BBA, RN, Maggie Yeung, RN, and George K.H. Li, MBBS, FRCS(Ed), PCHSHK, FHKAM(Surg)

Various symptoms are frequently reported by patients with cancer during or after treatment. Fatigue, pain, anxiety, and depression are among the most common (National Institutes of Health, 2004). Most previous literature has examined a single symptom and its effect on patients’ functional status and quality of life (QOL). However, patients often experience more than one symptom. The concurrence of related symptoms may have adverse effects on patient outcomes. This study examines the prevalence of fatigue, pain, anxiety, and depression, the relationships among these symptoms, and their effects as well as the effects of other sociodemographic and clinical factors on the QOL of patients with breast cancer undergoing treatment.

Literature Review

Incidence and Survival Rate of Patients With Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers worldwide (Breast Health Global Initiative, n.d.). In Hong Kong, breast cancer ranks as the most common cancer and the third leading cause of cancer death in the female population (Hospital Authority: Hong Kong Cancer Registry, 2006b). The incidence rates have increased steadily from 47.7 per 100,000 in 1996 to 72 per 100,000 in 2006 (Hospital Authority: Hong Kong Cancer Registry, 2006a).

The advanced development of cancer treatment increases the survival rate and prolongs lifespan. Overall, the five-year survival rate ranges from 100% (among...