

# Symptom Monitoring, Alleviation, and Self-Care Among Mexican Americans During Cancer Treatment

Phoebe D. Williams, PhD, RN, FAAN, Leticia S. Lantican, PhD, RN, Julia O. Bader, PhD, and Daniela Lerma, MBA



© monkeybusinessimages/iStockphoto

Monitoring the occurrence and severity of symptoms among Mexican American adults undergoing cancer treatments, along with their self-care to alleviate symptoms, are understudied; the current study aimed to fill this gap in the literature. A total of 67 Mexican Americans receiving outpatient oncology treatments in the southwestern United States participated. Instruments included a patient-report checklist, the Therapy-Related Symptom Checklist (TRSC), the Symptom Alleviation: Self-Care Methods tool, and a demographic and health information form. At least 40% of participants reported the occurrence of 12 symptoms: hair loss, feeling sluggish, nausea, taste change, loss of appetite, depression, difficulty sleeping, weight loss, difficulty concentrating, constipation, skin changes, and numb fingers and toes. More than a third also reported pain, vomiting, decreased interest in sexual activity, cough, and sore throat. The helpful self-care strategies reported included diet and nutrition changes; lifestyle changes; and mind, body control, and spiritual activities. Patient report of symptoms during cancer treatments was facilitated by the use of the TRSC. Patients use symptom alleviation strategies to help relieve symptoms during their cancer treatment. The ability to perform appropriate, effective self-care methods to alleviate the symptoms may influence adherence to the treatment regimen.

Phoebe D. Williams, PhD, RN, FAAN, is a professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City; and Leticia S. Lantican, PhD, RN, is an associate professor emeritus in the College of Health Sciences and the School of Nursing, Julia O. Bader, PhD, is a research specialist and statistician in the Statistical Consulting Lab, and Daniela Lerma, MBA, is assistant to the dean, all at the University of Texas at El Paso. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article. This study was supported, in part, by a grant (MD 0005-48) from the Hispanic Health Disparities Research Integrative Medicine, a division of the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities. The content of this article has been reviewed by independent peer reviewers to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the independent peer reviewers or editorial staff. Williams can be reached at [pwilliam@kumc.edu](mailto:pwilliam@kumc.edu), with copy to editor at [CJONEditor@ons.org](mailto:CJONEditor@ons.org). (Submitted October 2013. Revision submitted December 2013. Accepted for publication December 12, 2013.)

Key words: patient-reported symptoms; checklist; TRSC; symptom monitoring; symptom alleviation; self-care; Mexican Americans; cancer treatments

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/14.CJON.547-554

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States, exceeded only by heart disease (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2014b). Cancer is an illness that affects Americans of all racial and ethnic groups. The economic and psychosocial burdens associated with cancer treatment are substantial for patients and their families (Barry & Dancey, 2005; Basch et al., 2005; Dodd, Miaskowski, & Paul, 2001; Williams et al., 1997, 2001; Williams, Balabagno, et al., 2010; Williams, Graham, et al., 2013; Williams, Lopez, et al., 2010; Williams, Piamjariyakul, et al., 2006; Williams, Williams, Smith, et al., 2011; Yabroff, Lawrence, Clauser, Davis, & Brown, 2004; Youngblood, Williams, Eyles, Waring, & Runyon, 1994).

Epidemiologic data show increasing cancer incidence and mortality in minorities (Clegg, Li, Hankey, & Edwards, 2002; Ward et

al., 2004)—particularly among Hispanics, a fast-growing ethnic group in the United States (ACS, 2014b; Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2008). Hispanics of Mexican origin constitute the single largest subgroup of the Hispanic population (67%), and the number of Hispanics living in the United States is predicted to reach 102 million by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Cancer accounts for 20% of all deaths in Hispanics (ACS, 2014b). Breast cancer is the leading type of cancer among Hispanic women, and lung and bronchus cancers are the leading types among Hispanic men (ACS, 2014b; Blackman & Masi, 2006; Collins, Villagran, & Sparks, 2008; Lopez-McKee, McNeill, Bader, & Morales, 2008; Ward et al., 2004; Zambrana, Breen, Fox, & Gutierrez-Mohamed, 1999). Cancer is the third focus area in the U.S. Healthy People 2010 report; a major objective is to reduce the number of new