

Evidence-Based Yoga Interventions for Patients With Cancer

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Background: Introducing patients with cancer to the practice of yoga can be beneficial for coping with the side effects of treatment and the psychological aspects of cancer that are often difficult and distressing for patients. Oncology nurses can learn to use simple yoga techniques for themselves and as interventions with their patients.

Objectives: This article provides details about the development and implementation of a yoga class for patients with cancer and provides details about other ways nurses can integrate yoga into oncology nursing and cancer care.

Methods: Current research literature was reviewed and synthesized to provide support for the use of yoga as an evidence-based nursing intervention. A detailed approach for implementing yoga into professional practice was delineated.

Findings: Yoga techniques can be easily integrated into nursing practice and have been shown to be beneficial for patients and nurses.

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The practice of yoga originated about 5,000 years ago; the term is from a Sanskrit word that means “to join or unite” (Baum, 2013). The practice combines physical postures, breathing exercises, meditation, and philosophy. Cancer and dealing with the side effects of cancer treatment can be extremely stressful physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The focus of yoga on the body, mind, and spirit makes it particularly helpful for individuals coping with cancer. An article published in *Yoga Journal* reported that many patients with cancer are turning to yoga because it helps them to realize how people with a serious illness, such as cancer, can connect to their body and begin to experience self-empowerment and well-being instead of “running away” from their threatened body (Boucher, 1999). With training, oncology nurses can learn to use yoga as an intervention to help patients decrease stress and alleviate side effects to improve quality of life and their sense of well-being.

The term *stress* was coined by Hans Selye in 1936, who defined it as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand

for change” (American Institute of Stress, 2016, para. 1). Stress is neither positive nor negative; it is a subjective experience based on one’s perception of the degree of threat an event or experience poses. A cancer diagnosis is commonly perceived as a significant threat that can create severe stress and anxiety in patients and their families. In addition, the sequelae of cancer treatment with its accompanying discomfort and side effects can be extremely stressful for patients.

Literature Review

Yoga is one of the complementary health approaches that the National Institute of Health’s National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (2013) recognizes as an increasingly popular and important therapy for which it provides information, education, and research support.

Nurses have a repertoire of evidence-based interventions to use to assist patients in managing their symptoms, ease untoward effects of treatment, and relieve the stress and