

Adolescents and young adults (AYAs) with cancer aged 15–39 years have unique medical, psychosocial, and informational needs. At the time of diagnosis, they are often going through important life milestones, such as establishing their independence, attending school or work, and maintaining romantic and/or family relationships. This article describes some of the critical time points for AYAs with cancer and the resources available to support the nursing profession in meeting the unique care needs of this population.

AT A GLANCE

- AYAs with cancer have unique care needs throughout their illness trajectory (diagnosis, survivorship, clinical trial enrollment, and palliation) that require the attention of their healthcare providers.
- Tools and resources have been established to screen for and intervene on AYA-specific concerns.
- Nurses are well positioned to assess the unique care needs of young people and to work with an interprofessional team to optimally address these concerns.

KEYWORDS

adolescents and young adults; AYAs; oncology nursing; informational needs

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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Crucial Conversations

Addressing informational needs of adolescents and young adults diagnosed with cancer

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Sarah is 29 years old and has been recently diagnosed with hormone-sensitive breast cancer. Her oncology team informed her that she will require gonadotoxic chemotherapy treatment, followed by surgery and endocrine therapy. Sarah's oncology team facilitated a referral to the clinical nurse specialist (CNS) involved in their cancer center's adolescent and young adult (AYA) program for additional support.

During the consultation, the CNS asked Sarah to complete a screening tool used to identify common concerns among young adults with cancer. Sarah identified several areas of concern: fertility, body image, coping support, and work. When exploring Sarah's responses to the screening tool, the CNS learned that Sarah is not in a romantic relationship but would like to have children in the future. In addition, Sarah is trying to decide between having a lumpectomy or a mastectomy, both of which are acceptable for managing her cancer. She feels isolated by her body image concerns and hopes to connect with other young women regarding their decision making for breast cancer surgery. Sarah also shared that she is employed in a marketing industry but does not have private benefits to pay for medication and is worried about having an income during her cancer treatment.

The CNS played an important role in Sarah's care by offering a tailored AYA assessment and by further offering education, resources, and navigation

to specialty services specific to Sarah's needs.

Defining the Population

The National Cancer Institute ([NCI], 2018) defines AYAs as individuals aged 15–39 years with a cancer diagnosis in North America. In the United States, about 70,000 AYAs are newly diagnosed with cancer each year, and this population is known to have different needs than children and older adults (Gupta, Edelstein, Albert-Green, & D'Agostino, 2013; NCI, 2018).

A cancer diagnosis is experienced differently for the AYA population because they are at a stage when they are establishing independence from their family, completing school, pursuing careers, starting romantic relationships, building financial stability, and/or planning a family (Quinn, Gonçalves, Sehovic, Bowman, & Reed, 2015). AYAs with cancer have many unique needs, which include fertility, sexual health, coping, diet and nutrition, school and work, exercise, life goals, palliative care, and finances, which require the attention of healthcare providers (Gupta et al., 2013; Ramphal et al., 2016; Tsangaris et al., 2014).

Customized Care

To optimally address the care of young people with cancer, healthcare providers should be knowledgeable about unique AYA concerns, provide relevant information, be flexible in care delivery, and further involve patients in