Cancer of the Gastrointestinal Tract
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A Handbook for Nurse Practitioners

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This series represents a significant addition to the nursing literature. The editors are respected experts and they have assembled a team of authors with the necessary experience and reputation to ensure the authority of each volume. From the stable of the prestigious specialist nurse endoscopy course at the University of Hull and based in the Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, this series will ensure that excellence will not be the preserve of these institutions.

Gastroenterology is an important field where nurses can develop and practise as specialist and advanced practitioners. The field extends from the inexplicable, such as irritable bowel syndrome, through the aetiological puzzle of inflammatory bowel disease, to life-threatening malignancies. Irritable bowel syndrome and inflammatory bowel disease both involve significant psychological morbidity and treatment in these areas is ripe for the development of nursing interventions such as counselling and behavioural therapies. Definitive diagnosis of inflammatory disorders and malignancies requires endoscopy, and this is an area where nursing makes a significant contribution through independent practice. Endoscopy is an invasive procedure which raises significant anxiety in patients and one where nurses are able to combine their psychosocial and technical skills. As such, nurses require well developed psychosocial skills – which are integral to nursing practice – and a deep knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the gastrointestinal tract. The series will ensure that all nurses, particularly those who wish to practise in the field of gastroenterology, will have a sound foundation.

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The care of the patient with cancer is a demanding but satisfying specialty in nursing. Contemporary oncology nursing practice relies on a broad knowledge base from the biomedical and behavioural sciences. Understanding the patient as an individual within the context of the family, work and environment is as important to the oncology nurse as knowledge of cancer as a disease and its treatment. Cancer is often referred to as a journey. Oncology nurses become part of the cancer journey as the patient travels from diagnosis and treatment to survival or death. This book focuses on the nursing care of the patient with cancer of the gastrointestinal tract and is intended as a primer for nurses who may not have experience in the oncology specialty.

The book begins with a comprehensive examination of the issues and scope of the frequently used term ‘quality of life’, providing a thorough critique of its meaning and assessment in practice. This content is presented as the first chapter because promotion of quality of life for the patient and family is a major concern of oncology nursing practice. To be effective the nurse needs a clear understanding of quality of life, how to measure it and how to evaluate the impact of nursing interventions. Chapters 2 and 3 take an in-depth look at the impact of cancer on the individual and the family. The purpose of these two chapters is to consider the cancer patient as an individual within the context of the family, providing practical suggestions for understanding and helping the patient and family. These three chapters form the foundation for the subsequent chapters.

Chapters 4–6 introduce the principal aspects of cancer as a disease from both a medical and a nursing perspective, beginning with cancers of the aerodigestive tract through to lower
gastrointestinal cancers. Each chapter is written by medical and nurse co-authors to provide a more complete view of patient care. Chapter 7 covers the role of nutrition in the prevention of cancer and the nutritional management of patients with cancer.

The final three chapters of the book focus on the specific nursing care of the patient undergoing cancer treatment. Chapters 8 and 9 provide a guide to the management of patients undergoing radiotherapy and chemotherapy in order to familiarize the gastroenterology nurse with what may lie ahead for the patient. The chapters are not designed to prepare the nurse to administer chemotherapy or work in the specialty of radiotherapy, but rather to become aware of the major issues and the experience of patients. The final chapter outlines the principles of symptom management and palliative care for integration into patient care throughout the cancer journey.

*Cancer of the Gastrointestinal Tract: A handbook for nurse practitioners* is one of a series of texts written for the gastroenterology nurse. The book does not include information on cancer at a cellular level; the reader is directed to the many comprehensive texts that are already available. The aim here is to provide a sufficiently broad introduction and discussion of oncology nursing with a clear focus on patient- and family-centred care.

Davina Porock and Diane Palmer
November 2003
CHAPTER 1

Quality of life and the cancer journey

SUZANNE NIKOLETTI AND ROBIN COHEN

A diagnosis of cancer has a profound impact on the quality of life of patients and their families. This chapter traces the theoretical underpinnings of quality of life in relation to cancer. The aim is to provide a context for subsequent chapters in which the events, treatment options and management strategies can be considered more readily from the patient’s perspective. Although the quality of life of family members is important as well, it is not covered in this chapter.

Why should we study quality of life?

Patients engage the healthcare system because they have suffering that needs to be relieved (Mechanic, 1962). For those with cancer, anticancer treatment may relieve part of the suffering, but the diagnosis and treatment both produce suffering that is not addressed by interventions focusing on the body alone. Quality of life – a person’s subjective sense of well-being – has become an important area of cancer research in the last few decades. The impetus for much of this research can be linked to significant advances in medical technology and cancer treatments, which have resulted in prolonged survival times for many patients. Such treatments, while increasing the quantity of life, are often aggressive and may cause severe side effects, which compromise quality of life. Furthermore, in situations where cancer treatments are non-curative and aim instead to improve comfort or function, quality rather than quantity of life becomes the central concern for patients and their families. In addition, the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness such as cancer has itself a tremendous