

Radiation Therapy and Patient Fear

Radiation therapy has been shown to be an effective treatment method for cancer patients, and with more than 14 million cancer cases presented each year, radiation therapy has the potential to treat 3.5 million people and provide palliative relief for an additional 3.5 million (Jaffray, 2015). Studies have indicated that radiation therapy is associated with anxiety and distress (Dong, 2014). It is estimated that approximately one third of radiation therapy patients have unmet psychosocial needs that can negatively impact the quality of their radiation therapy (Elsner, 2017). A common fear that is shared by many cancer patients is the fear of cancer recurrence, even if radiation therapy appears to be successful (Crist & Grunfeld, 2012).

Radiation therapists provide psychosocial support for patients, but their role providing this support is not well defined, and some of what cancer patients are experiencing may be overlooked (Elsner, 2017). Many radiation therapy patients are familiar with the side effects that come after receiving treatment such as nausea, fatigue, and redness of the skin. The fear of receiving these side effects along with any other fears that come with having cancer are a great concern. Of the patients receiving radiation therapy 49% experience anxiety or distress (Elsner, 2017). The challenge of patients dealing with fear and anxiety is a real issue, and fear that develops into anxiety is an area that has not fully been addressed (Perusini & Fanselow, 2015)

Conducting survey research regarding fear and anxiety, with radiation therapy patients will enable a greater understanding about what patients are feeling, and may contribute to how radiation therapists can become better able to provide needed psychosocial support for their patients.

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