Patient Empowerment in the Management of Chronic Myeloid Leukemia

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Patients newly diagnosed with cancer often believe the misconception that a cancer diagnosis automatically means a death sentence, but survival after diagnosis depends on many factors, including type of cancer, stage at diagnosis, and response to initial therapy (American Cancer Society, 2013). For example, chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) is a hematologic cancer characterized by the overgrowth of myeloid cells in the bone marrow and their accumulation in the peripheral blood. Most patients with CML are diagnosed in the early chronic phase (CML-CP) of disease (Cortes et al., 2006). With modern therapy, survival rates of patients with CML have improved dramatically since 2001 (Björkholm et al., 2011; Kantarjian, O’Brien, et al., 2012), and CML-CP has been rendered a chronic condition that is manageable with continuous lifelong medication for most patients.

Receiving a diagnosis of CML is an extremely stressful event, after which patients may experience feelings ranging from anger to helplessness (Guilhot et al., 2013). In addition, once patients find their way to a new normal after diagnosis, they must undergo treatment that may last a lifetime. What can be done to encourage a more positive outlook? What can be done to ensure that motivation stays high for patient adherence over the long course of treatment? How can patients be empowered to play a positive role in the management of their disease?

Oncology nurses often are in a position to foster and maintain strong healthcare relationships with their patients. Recognizing the links that connect patient empowerment, patient involvement in care, health-related quality of life (HRQOL), adherence, and clinical outcomes, oncology nurses should seek to empower patients to have greater involvement in their care. The management of patients with CML has become more prevalent because of the extension of life expectancy afforded by modern therapy (Huang, Cortes, & Kantarjian, 2012). As more patients live longer with CML as a chronic condition, healthcare providers and patients must stay involved and motivated for many years.

The current article outlines clinical evidence for standard therapy for CML and summarizes clinical findings that connect the concepts of patient empowerment, patient involvement in...