

Fatigue experiences of patients with breast cancer in Taiwan

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Background: Breast cancer is one of the most common types of cancer among women. For cancer patients, fatigue is the major distress symptom that may interfere with their physical, psychological, and social balance status.

Purpose: To explore fatigue status, factors related to fatigue, and methods for dealing with fatigue among patients with breast cancer in Taiwan.

Method: Mixed methods that combined qualitative and quantitative strategies of data collection. Two hundred and eleven women, aged 29-82 (mean=50.81), with breast cancer was recruited from the oncology outpatient department in a teaching hospital in Northern Taiwan.

Results: The study showed that patients experienced medium levels of fatigue. They believed that fatigue is a complex phenomenon covering physical, psychological and social aspects. Several factors were significantly related to fatigue, including: currently receiving chemotherapy ($p<.001$) or radiation therapy ($p=.013$), education ($p<.001$) and marriage ($p<.001$) status, along with other symptoms ($p=.011$), such as pain ($p<.001$), depression ($p=.032$), poor appetite ($p<.001$) and nausea ($p<.001$). When feeling fatigue, most patients decided to tell to their families (68.2%) and friends (22.7%) or endure their situation alone (35.5%); nevertheless only 19 percent of patients discussed their condition with health care professionals. Regarding the ways in which patients dealt with fatigue, most had selected to rearrange their daily schedules and eating habits, readjust their mental attitudes, and find support among others. Sixty-one percent ($N=129$) of patients believed that rearranging their daily schedule was the most useful strategy for dealing with fatigue.

Conclusions: In raising awareness about fatigue, health care professionals can help patients with breast cancer manage or relieve fatigue by controlling symptoms, providing emotional support, and making related resources available.

Biography

Hung-Ru Lin, is an associate professor and director of School of Nursing at National Taipei University of Nursing and Health Sciences. Besides teaching and professional services, she continued to participate in research studies. She has published more than twenty articles in Taiwan and several international journals, including Cancer Nursing, Journal of Advanced Nursing, Journal of Clinical Nursing, Journal of Nursing Research, Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing, and Oncology Nursing Forum

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