

# The Role of Hope in Patients With Cancer

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To synthesize the literature, develop generalizations, and identify issues that should be evaluated in the future in regard to hope and patients with cancer.

**Data Sources:** MEDLINE®, CINAHL®, and PsycINFO databases.

**Data Synthesis:** Twenty-six research articles published from 1982–2005 met the criteria for review. Four major themes emerged: (a) exploring the level of hope in patients with cancer, (b) discovering how patients cope with a cancer diagnosis, (c) identifying strategies that patients with cancer commonly use to maintain hope, and (d) identifying nursing interventions used to assist patients with cancer in maintaining and fostering hope.

**Conclusions:** The concept of hope should be developed systematically to extend knowledge and build a logical program of research based on previous studies.

**Implications for Nursing:** Nurses need to develop new interventions to foster patients' hope and new instruments that can be used to measure outcomes.

## Key Points . . .

- Formulating a distinctly constructive nursing care guide is vital to maintaining hope and achieving short-term goals in patients with cancer.
- Nursing interventions to enable hope need not be delivered in a formal setting; interventions can occur in patient rooms, during home visits, or at clinic appointments.
- Developing stage-specific realistic hope and enabling interventions are necessary and essential for the practice of nursing.

For centuries, cancer has been considered a deadly disease. Because of significant progress in medical knowledge and technology, early-stage cancer can be cured in many cases. Nevertheless, most patients feel devastated and frustrated when their cancer is first diagnosed, and many still must fight a very difficult battle against the disease (Lin & Bauer-Wu, 2003). Because of fear about an uncertain future, patients often begin looking to additional sources for support in handling the stress of their disease. Hope is considered an effective coping strategy for patients with cancer, providing adaptive power to help them get through the difficult situation and achieve desired goals (Ebright & Lyon, 2002; Herth, 1987, 1989). Hope often is considered an important factor in patients' personal adjustments during times of loss, uncertainty, and suffering (Herth & Cutcliffe, 2002a; Lee, 2001). However, the concept of hope has been challenging to research because of its ambiguous nature, its blend of intangibility and reality, and various individual interpretations of its meaning.

Hope generally is a desire that an individual anticipates for the future (Clarke & Kissane, 2002; Van Dongen, 1998). From a psychological perspective, hope's desires may be a lifelong pursuit. Hope reflects an individual's perceptions about his or her ability to conceptualize goals, develop strategies to reach goals, and sustain the motivation to use the strategies (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003). Hope typically is directed to the future and can be used in different ways. Hope also can be considered to be personal will power. In addition, if individuals have enough hope, they might change a detrimental situation or illness (Van Dongen).

From the nursing point of view, hope has been described as an important coping strategy for individuals experiencing difficult situations. It provides adaptive power and allows personal adjustment during suffering (Ebright & Lyon, 2002; Herth, 1987, 1989; Herth & Cutcliffe, 2002a; Lee, 2001). Positive attitudes and thoughts, despite difficult situations, are important methods for nurturing hope (Saleh & Brockopp, 2001). Overall, hope is probably the single most important element in the lives of patients and family members struggling with a diagnosis of cancer (Hickey, 1986); therefore, enabling and maintaining a sense of hope in patients with cancer are essential for assisting them in battling illness.

To understand the role of hope in patients with cancer, a primary nursing research literature review was conducted. The purpose of this article is to synthesize conclusions from the literature, develop generalizations, and identify issues that need to be examined and perhaps reevaluated.

## Scope of the Review

A comprehensive literature review was conducted using the MEDLINE®, CINAHL®, and PsycINFO online databases. Key words used when searching the databases were coping, spiritual, meaning, hope, distress factor, future orientation, empowerment, transcendent, living, and hope intervention. All key words were linked with cancers and patients with

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