

Untreated Peristomal Skin Complications Among Long-Term Colorectal Cancer Survivors With Ostomies

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This ethnography of family caregiving explored why peristomal skin complications are common and undertreated among colorectal cancer survivors with intestinal ostomies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 31 cancer survivors and their family caregivers, fieldwork, structured assessments, and medical records review, and analyzed with qualitative theme and matrix analyses. Survivors who received help changing the skin barrier around their stoma had fewer obstacles to detection and treatment of peristomal skin complications. Half of the survivors received unpaid help with ostomy care, and all such help came from spouses. Married couples who collaborated in ostomy care reported that having assistance in placing the ostomy appliance helped with preventing leaks, detecting skin changes, and modifying ostomy care routines. In addition, survivors who struggled to manage ostomy care independently reported more obstacles to alleviating and seeking treatment for skin problems. Oncology nurses can improve treatment of peristomal skin problems by asking patients and caregivers about ostomy care and skin problems, examining the peristomal area, and facilitating routine checkups with a wound, ostomy, and continence nurse.

Although the United States has 11.9 million cancer survivors (Parry, Kent, Mariotto, Alfano, & Rowland, 2011), healthcare providers have limited evidence and guidelines on how to assess and care for survivors who are living with long-term and late effects of cancer and its treatment (Bober et al., 2009; Forman et al., 2003; Maddams et al., 2009). Cancer survivorship experiences in old age are particularly important to document, given that 60% of cancer survivors are older than 65 (Horner et al., 2009; Parry et al., 2011). This article focuses on the specific challenges of colorectal cancer (CRC) survivors with intestinal stomas (ostomies). The proportion of CRC survivors aged 65

At a Glance

- ◆ Peristomal skin problems often go undetected and untreated by patients and caregivers.
- ◆ Ethnographic methods can be used to explore the physical, cognitive, and emotional work of caregiving.
- ◆ Survivors who faced the greatest barriers to detection and treatment of skin problems lived alone or without a spouse, could not see their peristomal area, or had negative feelings about getting help with ostomy care.

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