Patients with cancer are prone to psychological distress related to the cancer diagnosis (Holland & Alici, 2010). Psychological distress is a general term used to describe negative feelings or emotions that affect one’s level of functioning and interfere with activities of daily living (Ridner, 2004). Psychological distress can result in distorted views of the self and circumstances and is manifested by sadness, anxiety, distraction, and symptoms of mental illness (Ridner, 2004). When a person has cancer, psychological distress can affect finances, family, sexuality, spirituality, and many other aspects of life. Patients living within five years of a cancer diagnosis are shown to need more attention to changes in functioning, including psychological distress (Harding, 2012). This distress may lead to major psychiatric illness; however, more commonly, the patient experiences symptoms of depression or anxiety as a consequence of having cancer. Nurses must recognize and assess for psychological distress in patients, as well as provide appropriate interventions. Nurses who pair clinical care of patients with psychosocial interventions provide an avenue for holistic focus on each patient. The purpose of this article is to define and describe the term cancer-related psychological distress as a person’s negative emotional response to a cancer diagnosis.

Methods

A literature review of CINAHL®, PsycINFO®, and PubMed databases was conducted to search publications from 1999–2016 using the key words psychological distress, cancer or neoplasm, stress, nursing, and concept analysis. The search was then refined using the following filters: publications from 2011–2016, participants aged 18 years or older, and publications written in the English language. Twenty-four articles were reviewed for potential use in the concept analysis.