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## Coping with Chronic Cancer Pain: A Test of the Self-efficacy Theory

### Key Words

Cancer pain management

Self-efficacy

Outcome expectancies

Coping

### ABSTRACT

**Background.** Pain is one of the most dreaded consequences of cancer. The Agency for Health Care Policy and Research in U.S. (AHCPR) has suggested that there is an urgent need for cancer patients to learn to cope with their pain. However, it is significant that self-efficacy and coping strategies in the management of cancer pain are fraught with appreciable pain intensity and pain interference.

**Aims.** To explore the coping strategies used by patients with chronic cancer pain, to examine the relationships of self-efficacy to pain outcomes and coping, and to determine the role of outcome expectancies in coping with pain.

**Methods.** Eighty-eight patients with chronic cancer pain were recruited from an outpatient oncology clinic. Patients completed the Self-efficacy Questionnaire, the Outcome Expectancies Questionnaire, the Coping Behaviors Instrument, the Mental Health Inventory, and the Brief Pain Inventory which were mailed to them.

**Results.** Overall, the most frequently used coping behaviors were increasing activity levels, reporting pain, using pain medications, and coping self-statements. Patients' self-efficacy for coping with pain was inversely correlated with pain intensity and pain interference with daily life. Perceived self-efficacy was positively correlated with perseverance in the use of coping behaviors but not with the level of distress. Use of coping was positively related to pain intensity and pain interference with daily life. Outcome expectancies were positively correlated with the use of coping behaviors.

**Conclusions.** These findings showed that there is a tremendous need to investigate the impact of non-pharmacological approaches to management of cancer pain in future research, as well as to make suggestions for refinement of the self-efficacy theory. (N. Taipei J. Med. 2002;4:80-88)

### INTRODUCTION

Chronic pain is one of the most dreaded complications for cancer patients and affects the overall quality of life.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the need for more effective man-

agement of cancer pain, the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR) has developed guidelines, including pharmacological and non-pharmacological strategies, aimed at assisting cancer patients cope with their pain.

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