

Introduction

H. K. van Halteren

*Department of Internal Medicine, Gelderse Vallei Hospital,
Ede, The Netherlands*

A. Jatoi

Department of Oncology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA

What questions are cancer patients asking? Although cancer patients and cancer survivors have diverse educational requests that include asking about cancer treatment options, the logistics of cancer therapy, prognosis, cancer risk, and the long-term complications of such treatment, a large proportion of recurrently voiced questions focuses on the more mundane and might be distilled down to the following: “What should I be eating?” Zembrak surveyed 879 young adult cancer patients and survivors, probing into what types of information they needed the most.⁽¹⁾ As expected, at the top of this list was a stated need for more instruction on diet and nutrition. Yet, surprisingly, approximately 50% of respondents voiced that their educational needs remained unmet.

This current series of chapters on nutrition and cancer attempts to meet such educational needs. This handbook was conceived under the premise that an educational resource on nutrition and cancer for healthcare providers would give rise to better-informed providers who, in turn, would impart important information to better educate cancer patients and their families on issues surrounding nutrition and cancer.

Interestingly, although the original intention of this handbook was to inform, the end result, at times, appears to be an uncovering of incomplete information or controversy. Despite extensive research, it still remains challenging to know for sure when best to provide nutritional support to cancer patients, how best to monitor cancer patients who are receiving such nutritional support, and whether to prescribe a variety

of novel, seemingly promising nutritional interventions in a clinical oncology or survivorship setting. Moreover, recent large nutritional epidemiological studies have at times yielded controversial or unexpected results, thus further illustrating the point that more research on diet and cancer risk needs to be forthcoming.

For now, however, the *ESMO Handbook of Nutrition and Cancer* provides an up-to-date, important starting point to help healthcare providers – and ultimately patients – better understand the complex interactions between nutrition and cancer. The hope is that, over time, further research will provide more clarity on how best to advise, educate, and manage cancer patients and cancer survivors who come to us with questions on diet and nutrition.

Declaration of Interest:

Dr van Halteren has reported no conflicts of interest.

Professor Jatoi has reported no conflicts of interest.

Reference

1. Zebrack B. Information and service needs for young adult cancer survivors. *Support Care Cancer* 2009; 17:349–357.