**Ineffective Coping**

### Assessment Data

**Nursing Assessment**
Ruby Smithson is a 55-year-old mother of four children who is hospitalized with breast cancer. She is scheduled for a modified radical mastectomy. Ruby was relatively healthy until she found a lump in her right breast 1 week ago. She and her husband are extremely anxious about the surgery. Ruby confides to the admitting nurse that “I can’t stand the idea of having one of my breasts cut off; I don’t know how I’m going to be able to even look at myself.” Mr. Smithson informs the nurse that Ruby has been abusing alcohol since her diagnosis and neglecting her responsibilities as a mother. She is tearful and doesn’t see how she will be able to continue her work as a dress designer.

**Physical Examination**
- Height: 164 cm (5’5”)
- Weight: 58 kg (158 lb)
- Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F)
- Pulse rate: 88 BPM
- Respirations: 16/minute
- Blood pressure: 142/88 mm Hg

**Diagnostic Data**
- Chest x-ray negative, CBC, and urinalysis within normal limits

### Nursing Diagnosis

*Ineffective Coping related to personal vulnerability secondary to mastectomy (as evidenced by verbalization of inability to cope, substance abuse, inability to meet role expectations)*

### Desired Outcomes*

**Coping** [1302], as evidenced by often demonstrating ability to
- Identify effective and ineffective coping patterns
- Verbalize sense of control
- Report decrease in negative feelings
- Modify lifestyle as needed

**Social Support** [1504], as evidenced by substantial reports of
- Willingness to call on others for help
- Emotional assistance provided by others

### Nursing Interventions*/Selected Activities

**Coping Enhancement** [5230]

- Provide an atmosphere of acceptance.
  - Establishing rapport is essential to a therapeutic relationship and supports the client in self-reflection. Recognizing problems and sharing feelings is best brought about in an atmosphere of warmth and trust.

- Provide factual information concerning the diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis.
  - Factual information serves as a foundation for Ruby to explore feelings and alternative coping strategies. Stressed clients often misunderstand facts and require frequent clarification so that appropriate conclusions can be drawn. Having valid information helps relieve stress.

- Appraise Ruby’s adjustment to changes in body image.
  - Alteration in body image may be a major issue for Ruby and should be explored to facilitate therapeutic intervention. Coping strategies often change with a reappraisal of the situation.

- Arrange situations that encourage her autonomy. Give her as many opportunities as possible to make decisions/choices for herself.
  - Enhances a sense of control, personal achievement, and self-esteem.

- Explore with her previous methods of dealing with life problems.
  - Present and past coping status assists both Ruby and her husband in capitalizing on successful methods, identifying ineffective strategies, and developing new skills more appropriate to the present situation. Also determines risk for inflicting self-harm.

- Encourage verbalization of feelings, perceptions, and fears.
  - Open, nonthreatening discussions facilitate the identification of causative and contributing factors.

- Encourage Ruby to identify her own strengths and abilities.
  - Assists Ruby to develop appropriate strategies for coping based on personal strengths and previous experiences. Improves self-concept and sense of ability to manage stress.
Individuals experiencing stress may have unrealistic perceptions or reality distortions. Helping Ruby clearly describe her role would be beneficial in developing realistic goals for role achievement. Assists the individual in channeling potentially harmful emotions and physical energy into constructive behavior.

NURSING INTERVENTIONS/SELECTED ACTIVITIES* RATIONALE

| Encourage Ruby to realistically describe changes in her role. | Individuals experiencing stress may have unrealistic perceptions or reality distortions. Helping Ruby clearly describe her role would be beneficial in developing realistic goals for role achievement. |
| Foster constructive outlets for anger and hostility. | Assists the individual in channeling potentially harmful emotions and physical energy into constructive behavior. |

**Support System Enhancement [5440]**

| Observe the degree of family support. | Assessing family interaction serves as a basis for identifying Ruby’s support systems or lack thereof. |
| Determine barriers to using support systems. | Although adequate support systems may be available, Ruby may not be using them or may be using them ineffectively. |
| Involve husband, family, and friends in the care and planning. | Supporting Ruby in acknowledging changes in her appearance conveys acceptance and provides a foundation for her to begin to adjust. |
| Discuss with concerned others how they can help. | Family and friends are often willing but unsure how to help. Identifying specific strategies such as praise and encouragement during rehabilitation and healing will promote acceptance of change. |
| Refer Ruby to a community-based breast cancer support group. | Community support is beneficial in helping to meet unresolved needs, decreasing feelings of social isolation, and facilitating a positive self-image. |

**EVALUATION**

The coping outcome was not met. Following surgery, Ruby was withdrawn. During bathing, she would not assist and turned her head away when the dressing was removed. She refused to learn how to manage the wound drain or to discuss her feelings or plans for the future. Because clients having a mastectomy are often only hospitalized for a few days, it may be that she requires more time to reach the desired outcome. Continue to offer information and demonstrate availability for when she is ready to verbalize feelings. Social support outcome partly met. Ruby allows her husband to provide direct care and emotional support for her. A social worker was consulted and discharge was delayed for 24 hours. Ruby has agreed that the social worker can contact a breast cancer support group and ask the group to call her.

*The NOC # for desired outcomes and the NIC # for nursing interventions are listed in brackets following the appropriate outcome or intervention. Outcomes, indicators, interventions, and activities selected are only a sample of those suggested by NOC and NIC and should be further individualized for each client.*

**APPLYING CRITICAL THINKING**

1. If Ruby had been able to choose a lumpectomy rather than a mastectomy (less visible, smaller, potentially less “meaningful” tissue removal), would the nursing diagnosis and expected outcomes remain the same? Why or why not?
2. Does Ruby’s situation reflect more of a stimulus-based model or a response-based model? Why?
3. While working with Ruby, she becomes very angry and says to you “You don’t understand. You’ve never had to go through this.” How would you respond?
4. Based on the evaluation above, do you believe that Ruby is in crisis? What factors led to your decision? How does your view change the modifications indicated in her care plan?
5. Give one example of how Ruby might use the defense mechanisms described on page 1067. Explain whether this is adaptive or maladaptive.

See Critical Thinking Possibilities in Appendix A.