When a woman develops symptoms relating to her breasts she may become very anxious and look to a number of sources for support and reassurance. This chapter will address the issue of breast cancer, its development, predisposing factors, investigation procedures and the various treatment options that are currently available to women who develop the disease, plus the effects and side effects of these treatments. Breast cancer screening and nursing interventions for women undergoing therapeutic management will be discussed in order to raise awareness of nurses who will come into contact with breast cancer sufferers in both a professional and personal capacity. The second section of this chapter will adopt a similar approach to cancer of the cervix, as cancer of these two organs is very common and has caused high levels of morbidity and mortality throughout the world.

Contents

- Definitions of breast cancer and cervical cancer
- Epidemiology
- Aetiology
- Anatomy and physiology
- Pathophysiology
- Clinical manifestations
- Investigative tests
- Treatment
- Nursing interventions
Learning Objectives

By the end of the chapter you should be able to demonstrate knowledge of

■ The definition of breast cancer.
■ How widespread the disease is globally.
■ Risk factors associated with breast cancer development.
■ Screening programmes to detect the disease.
■ How women with breast cancer present their anatomical and physiological signs and symptoms.
■ The psychological effect of discovering a breast lump.
■ Breast cancer treatments.
■ Care of the woman who is receiving therapy for breast cancer.
■ Alternative agents who may offer assistance during recovery from treatment.
■ Later alternatives.
■ Similar aspects relating to cancer of the cervix.

Definition of Breast Cancer

Malignant changes of any of the breast tissues that may occur at any time of life and in any population. These changes, unless treated, will lead to death.

Epidemiology

Breast cancer is not a new disease, it has been recognized throughout the world for centuries but is now the most common malignant condition diagnosed in women in the United Kingdom (UK) and the second most common cancer (Imperial Cancer Research Fund [ICRF] – now known as Cancer Research UK – 1999). A similar situation in the United States of America (USA) is indicated by the American Cancer Society (AMC) (1995), showing that among women in the USA ‘breast cancer accounts for one third of all cancers detected, and nearly one fifth of all cancer deaths’ (AMC, 1995).

Globally, cancer of the breast is the most common malignancy in women with more than 500 000 diagnoses reported each year, but with variations between developed countries (most common female cancer) and developing countries (second most frequently diagnosed female cancer) (Gail and Benichou, 1994). In Western societies generally, there is an incidence of one in ten females developing breast cancer at some time in their lives, many during their mid-50s with more than two-thirds being post-menopausal, although breast cancer frequency increases with age. It is rare in women under 30 years of age. In the UK in 1997, 34 590 women were recorded as suffering from breast