

EONS Award Lecture

1390

Facilitating patient choice: an imperative for cancer nurses

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Over the past number of years patients have become increasingly involved in making decisions about how their disease should be managed, most probably because paternalistic attitudes towards patient involvement in decision making are slowly disappearing and patients have become much more aware of their rights. Facilitating patient involvement in decision making is complex not least because a significant number do not want any involvement in the decision making process. There are many factors influencing this including a patients's willingness and ability to be involved in the decision making process, the attitude of the patient's family and the willingness and ability of health professional to facilitate patient choice. Cultural norms also play a significant role, as does the huge amount of information about cancer currently in the public domain.

Nurses have a key role in facilitating patient's involvement in decision making and in ensuring that patient choice is respected. To be effective patient advocates, nurses need to challenge paternalistic attitudes towards patient involvement in decision making and to ensure that, when patients do want to be actively involved in the decision making process, they have access to understandable and unbiased information. This is complex since not all health professional possess the skills to convey information effectively and some other information sources consulted by patients, such as the internet and mass media, often contain inaccurate and biased information.

Health professionals need to be aware that often there is a major disconnect between the attitude they hold towards the value of cancer treatments and that held by their patients. If no attempt is made to determine a patient's attitude toward treatment, there is a danger that decisions will be made based on the preferences of the health professionals involved. It is likely that decisions made under these circumstances are at best sub-optimal, and at worst, will have a devastating effect on the patient's quality and quantity of life.

Plenary Lecture

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Advancing oncology nursing practice – from novice to expert

Abstract not received.

Proffered Papers

Advanced practitioners in action

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ORAL

Measuring the impact of advanced nursing practice in cancer care

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Background: There are increasing numbers of specialist cancer nurses working in disease-specific advanced practice roles, and exciting opportunities to undertake a wider clinical and leadership remit exist. Evaluating the impact of these roles has so far proved problematic given the diverse spectrum of nursing practice and variations in local service provision.

The Nurse Clinician role, which combines expert practice with holistic nursing, was introduced into this cancer centre with the dual aims of improving the quality and continuity of patient care, and of assessing the contribution of experienced clinical nurses in organising cancer services across professional boundaries.

A comprehensive audit was undertaken to obtain feedback on the value of the role and to define the multidimensional nature of advanced nursing practice specifically within the colorectal and ovarian disease groups.

Methods: A total of 310 questionnaires was sent to medical and nursing colleagues throughout the hospital, and to patients who had had a consultation with either the colorectal or ovarian nurse clinician.

Results: A majority of patients, medical and nursing colleagues endorsed the extra time devoted to patient care, and the continuity and expertise that the role provided. Doctors supported the expansion of nursing roles where appropriate training had been undertaken, while many nurses highlighted a poor understanding of the parameters of advanced nursing practice. In general patients were initially surprised to be seen by a Nurse Clinician, instead of a doctor, but having experienced the service most expressed high levels of satisfaction.

Conclusion: Current policy within the United Kingdom emphasizes better utilization of nursing skills, especially within the clinical arena. This audit demonstrates the value of advanced nursing practice roles in the cancer care setting, provided that they are backed up with appropriate educational preparation and on-going support.