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POSTER

Support group programme for relatives to terminally ill cancer patients

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Purpose: The change from hospital care in the terminally phase of cancer patients life, to home-based care places great demands on the patient's family. Studies have shown that the relatives often place patients needs before their own. There is therefore a risk that relatives will be overburdened, with health risk implications. Family support has been identified as being the strongest independent factor associated with home death, and the most frequently reported reason for hospital admission is family exhaustion. In order to improve the psychosocial support to relatives to dying patients a project with educational and supportive group programmes was started. The aim of current study was to explore how relatives perceived their participation in an educational support group.

Methods: The study is a qualitative evaluation of the group programme. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using a phenomenographic method.

Results: Preliminary results indicated that relatives were very satisfied with the pedagogy and organisation of the programme. The groups perceived to be supportive both in a short and long perspective by creating mutuality among the group members.

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POSTER

Young adults with cancer: how their life-stage affects parents and families

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Purpose: This research aimed to discover if young adults between the ages of 18-25, diagnosed with life threatening cancers, experienced difficulties specifically associated with their life-stage that had a detrimental effect on the wider family over and above that caused by the illness.

Procedure: A narrative correspondence method was used to collect data from the parents of young adults with cancer. An appeal was published in a number of cancer charity newsletters, and parents who had cared for a young adult child with cancer were asked to send in accounts of their experience in either written or taped format. Such an approach allowed the respondents to remain in control of the process, responding only as and when they felt able. Rich and detailed qualitative data were received from respondents who wrote at length about their experiences.

Summary: Findings suggest that young people aged between 18-25, who may have recently found independence, face particular difficulties when diagnosed with a life threatening illness. The paper focuses on how these difficulties are experienced by those caring for the young adults. The findings suggest that life-stage exacerbates the following issues:

- the difficulty associated with relinquishing newly found independence and reverting to infantile patterns of reliance on parents
- the importance of maintaining 'normality' in terms of appearance and activities amongst peer groups
- the management and possible breakdown of newly established sexual relationships coupled with the possibility of future infertility
- the problems for parents that relate to the ownership of medical information when the young adult is of age but dependent on their parents
- the effect on siblings and the financial implications of the illness on the whole family

Conclusions: The data suggest strongly that families undergo considerable additional stress as a result of the life-stage effects of cancer in young adults. The gap in the knowledge amongst both professionals and families relating to these life-stage effects may result in families believing that the acute problems they face are caused by their particular family dynamics rather than by the life-stage of their young adult children. Thus it is important that health professionals in the field are made aware of these findings as they can play a crucial role by offering practical advice and information.

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POSTER

Spiritual support for families of cancer patients as assessed by nursing staff

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Purpose: to explore the views of nursing staff on the importance of spiritual support as well as their readiness and willingness to provide that support.

The purpose was also to examine the provision of spiritual support, obstacles to providing support and related factors.

Methods: A total of 166 nurses from five central hospitals in Finland took part in the study. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The analysis was based on SPSS statistical software and content analysis.

Results: Over half or 58% of the nurses felt they were poorly equipped to provide support and 53% were less or not at all willing to provide spiritual support. Nurses talked about spiritual issues and offered spiritual support for family members very rarely. There were many obstacles also concerning the provision of spiritual support. The age of nurses and the type of ward were associated with the provision of spiritual support.

Conclusion: Spiritual support for family members is part of nursing care but there are many questions which should be discussed openly.

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POSTER

An exploration of the nurses' experience of supporting a cancer patient in their search for meaning

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Background: This study arose from my own experience of working in the field of cancer care for many years, first as a Pastoral Chaplain and then as a Registered Nurse. In both roles I was involved in situations where people were searching for some meaning to their experience of cancer, the treatments involved, the side effects and the overall effect on their lives and the lives of those around them. Talking to my colleagues I found that their experience was similar and not unusual, as many clients turned to these nurses for support while searching for meaning amidst their illness.

Aims: This study was carried out as part of an MSc. and aimed at exploring nurses' experience of supporting clients in their search for meaning while living with cancer. The aim was not to suggest a definitive approach to this aspect of nursing care, nor to present a formal theory, but to allow themes to emerge that could be added to the knowledge and awareness of the issue.

Methods: The approach taken involved the use of interpretative phenomenology to interview 11 nurses working in the field of cancer care in a London Teaching Hospital, where I am currently employed. Each nurse was invited to share their experience of supporting cancer patients in their search for meaning during an interview which was audiotaped and later transcribed. Each interview took place either in a quiet room in the hospital, or in the interviewee's home, interviews lasted from one to two and half hours.

Findings: Having listened to, transcribed and reflected on many hours of often profoundly moving experiences, the following major themes were identified.

- the value of experience.
- understanding the search for meaning and how it may be expressed in different ways.
- the value of time spent with patients and the demands of a busy Unit.
- the multiple relationships involved.
- the skills used, and the importance of caring.
- the difficulties experienced.
- the support nurses need and how this is met.

In line with the methodology chosen, the researcher's involvement was recognised and valued.

Conclusion: Prior to this research, no study was found that had looked directly at this issue, using this approach. I believe the findings give insight into nurses' experiences. I believe this piece of research reiterates the value of nursing in today's world and the importance of the role of nursing in supporting a cancer patient in their search for meaning.