

Oncology Nurses' Experiences with Prognosis Related Communication

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Abstract

Background: Oncology nurses have opportunities to engage in prognosis related communication with advanced cancer patients but often encounter barriers that impede patient prognosis understanding. Deficits in prognosis understanding have been associated with delays in transitions to end of life care, overly aggressive and potentially non-beneficial cancer treatments, and poor quality of life.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to describe nurses' experiences with prognosis related communication with advanced cancer patients.

Methods: A framework of realism was used in this qualitative, descriptive design. A thematic analysis of audio-recorded interviews with oncology nurses (n=27) recruited from a Midwestern urban academic health center and 3 affiliated institutions was performed. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and accuracy checked. Data were coded by 3 experienced researchers. After coding, themes were identified, and a thematic map was developed. Methods to ensure trustworthiness of the findings were used.

Results: Six themes were identified: Being in the middle, assessing the situation, barriers to prognosis communication, nurse actions, benefits of prognosis understanding, and negative outcomes. Nurses managed barriers through facilitation, collaboration, or independent actions to assist patients and/or families with prognosis understanding.

Conclusions: Shortcomings in prognosis related communication with advanced cancer patients may contribute to negative outcomes for patients and nurses. Interventions to advance nurses' abilities to facilitate and engage in prognosis communications are needed. Inter-professional communication skills education may also be beneficial.