Cross-Cultural Communication in Oncology: Challenges and Training Interests

Orest Weber, MA, PhD, Brikela Sulstarova, MA, and Pascal Singy, MA, PhD

Communication is a key issue in oncology, in which complex content must be discussed, serious diagnoses announced, and crucial decisions made (Stiefel, 2006). Consequently, communication skills training (CST) for oncology clinicians has been developed over the past three decades (Stiefel et al., 2010). The aim of such training is to enable clinicians to provide effective and patient-centered communication (Razavi et al., 2000). CST is proven to have a beneficial impact on not only clinicians’ communication behavior, but also on their levels of professional stress (Delvaux et al., 2004; Fallowfield et al., 2002; Libert et al., 2007).

Intense global migrations have resulted in specific challenges for oncology clinicians. Factors potentially confusing cancer-related communication may be linguistic, cultural, social, and organizational in nature (Pergert, Ekblad, Enskär, & Björk, 2007, 2008; Surbone, 2010; Swinglehurst, Roberts, Li, Weber, & Singy, 2014). Clinicians face specific communication difficulties related to cultural