

Learning and Support Preferences of Adult Patients With Cancer at a Comprehensive Cancer Center

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Purpose/Objectives: To identify content items for an inclusive education curriculum for adult patients with cancer, as well as describe their learning and support preferences, determine the level of information provided to them, and assess the patients' interest in potential new services.

Design: Exploratory, descriptive survey research.

Setting: A National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Sample: All consenting adult patients with cancer who had appointments in the outpatient care setting during a two-week period (N = 1,310).

Methods: A 3-phase study identified core components of an inclusive educational curriculum, conducted structured interviews of patients with cancer, and validated findings in a selected sample.

Findings: The surveys were completed and returned by 48% (n = 625) of the patients. The most favored method for learning about all cancer topics was discussions with physicians (66%). Other preferred methods included brochures or booklets provided by physicians or nurses (33%), discussions with nurses (34%), self-selecting print media from information displays (20%), and talking with other patients with cancer (14%). Statistically significant differences in learning preferences were found among subgroups defined by age, gender, and education.

Conclusions: Patients preferred interactive, interpersonal communication with physicians or nurses. In addition, the prevailing method of education delivery for patients with cancer was providing print materials that support and enhance knowledge shared in the patient-healthcare team communication.

Implications for Nursing: This study confirms the importance of the learning and support preferences of patients with cancer. To implement a successful education program for their patients, nurses must be aware of patients' preferences for learning new information. Time must be set aside for one-on-one communication with patients, and print materials must be easily accessible to healthcare providers to support the patient-education process.

Key Points . . .

- ▶ Patients with cancer prefer to learn about their illness through interactive, interpersonal communication with their physicians.
- ▶ Providing reinforced messages in print materials can enhance communication between patients and healthcare teams.
- ▶ Successful education takes place when providers are aware of and adapt to patients' needs and preferences.

Assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation are vital components of the patient education process. Assessment, the first and most crucial part of the process, leads to a description of learning needs and characteristics and is the foundation for education planning and implementation (Almquist & Bookbinder, 1990; Giloth, 1993; Lorig, 1996; Rankin & Stallings, 1990; Redman, 1993; Volker, 1991). When an assessment of learning needs is not conducted, trial and error become the basis for patient teaching.

Realizing the importance of assessment, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) (1999a, 1999b), the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) (1995),

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