Knowledge and Attitudes About Cancer Pain Management: A Comparison of Oncology and Nononcology Nurses

Patricia Rushton, RN, PhD, AOCN®, Dennis Eggett, PhD, and Carolyn W. Sutherland, MS, RN

Purpose/Objectives: To obtain information about the knowledge and attitudes of Utah nurses concerning cancer pain management.

Design: Descriptive study.

Setting: Nurses in Utah.

Sample: 44 oncology nurses and 303 nononcology nurses completed the study.

Methods: Ferrell’s Nurses’ Knowledge and Attitudes Survey Regarding Pain was given to oncology and nononcology nurses to compare knowledge and attitudes about treating cancer pain.

Main Research Variables: Knowledge and attitudes regarding cancer pain.

Findings: Attitudes of oncology nurses were more in line with recommended practices (principles) of cancer pain management than those of nononcology nurses. Oncology nurses had a better understanding of recommended practices (principles) of cancer pain management than nononcology nurses but still struggled with understanding the pharmacology of medications used to manage cancer pain.

Conclusions: Nurses do not use evidence-based practice in pain management consistently. Continuing education regarding cancer pain management remains important for oncology and nononcology nurses.

Implications for Nursing: Adoption of evidence-based practice requires ongoing education of nurses and support from nursing colleagues, nursing administration, and associated healthcare providers. Data from this study can be used to design a curriculum involving content about cancer pain management. All members of the healthcare team should be supported in practicing the correct principles of cancer pain management in actual practice.

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