Improving Cancer Pain Management by Homecare Nurses

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Cancer-related pain often is undertreated despite the availability of effective interventions (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2002). Although educational programs have been presented regarding cancer pain management, mastery of this content and its use in practice by nurses has not been achieved (Elliott et al., 1997). Numerous factors have affected these results, including the contribution of angesic side effects to poor analgesic outcomes, the need for individual performance feedback, and the limitation of a single, rather than longitudinal, measure of outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of the two-tiered education program, Power Over Pain (POP), that was targeted to homecare nurses who manage pain and opioid-related side effects in patients with cancer-related pain. In addition to formal instruction, a pain management specialist offered individual feedback to participants throughout their six months in the study. The intervention was based on the belief that for nurses to change practice in pain management, two main areas of expertise are required: (a) Nurses must be experts in pain management strategies, particularly in pharmacologic options, and (b) nurses must have the communication skills to present viable options in an acceptable manner to physicians, pharmacists, patients, or caregivers. This article reports on a two-year study of the effectiveness of this intervention from a larger, ongoing research study involving nurses, patients, and caregivers.

**Key Points ...**

- Effective interventions for cancer-related pain exist, yet pain often is undertreated.
- Nurses, especially those in home care, must become experts in pain management and communication to advocate for their patients.
- Education interventions increase nurses’ knowledge and attitudes regarding pain, decrease barriers to pain control, and can help nurses reduce their patients’ perception of pain.

**Literature Review**

**Impact of Cancer-Related Pain on Homecare Management**

Family members are caring for patients at different stages of cancer in the home in increasing numbers (Pasacreta & Barg, 1998). Although the control and management of cancer is within the domain of healthcare professionals, the control and management of symptoms related to disease are shared by healthcare professionals, caregivers, and patients.

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