Building Family Caregiver Skills Using a Simulation-Based Intervention: A Randomized Pilot Trial

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OBJECTIVES: To evaluate the feasibility, acceptability, safety, and fidelity of a psychoeducational intervention to improve family caregiver technical and communication skills using structured simulations.

SAMPLE & SETTING: 18 family caregivers of adult patients receiving radiation therapy for head and neck cancer at University Hospitals Seidman Cancer Center in Cleveland, Ohio.

METHODS & VARIABLES: A two-group, randomized pilot trial design was used. The intervention consisted of four one-on-one sessions between the caregiver and nurse interventionist during the patient’s first, second, fourth, and sixth week of radiation treatment. Participants completed measures of self-efficacy for caregiving, anxiety, depression, and health-related quality of life at baseline, during the fifth week of radiation therapy, and four weeks after radiation therapy.

RESULTS: 4 of the 9 caregiver participants completed the intervention. Improvements in scores for the intervention group were noted for self-efficacy, global mental health, anxiety, and depression.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Refinement of the intervention is needed to improve feasibility. Although a caregiver intervention that incorporates simulation for skills training is acceptable and safe, flexibility in protocol is needed.

KEYWORDS family caregivers; experiential learning; simulation; head and neck cancer

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