

# Supportive Patient Care in the Guise of a Quilt

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Attention to the physical environment of an oncology center and the therapeutic potential of the environment are concepts to consider in nursing care. Art can enhance the human elements of caring and touch. Colorful quilts, whether hanging on the walls or given to patients, can provide emotional and physical warmth as well as represent a caring environment.

## Case Study

D.M., a 43-year-old woman, recently had an annual screening mammogram. A suspicious mass was noted, and she underwent a biopsy. D.M. was diagnosed with invasive cancer. She now presents to clinic for a consultation with the breast surgeon. After, D.M. waits in the conference room to speak with the nurse practitioner about her options for surgical treatment. A single parent of three school-age children, D.M. works full-time and is uncertain how she can possibly consider what is facing her— surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and years of anti-estrogen therapy. Her stomach is in knots, and she is tearful and anxious.

While D.M. waits, the oncology nurse talks with her about preoperative testing requirements. D.M. tells the nurse of her recent divorce and fears of dying and abandoning her three children. The nurse empathizes with D.M. and gives her a quick hug to show her support. D.M. tells the nurse that the colorful quilt on the conference room wall reminds her of her grandmother's home and the soft quilts she curled up with as a child. She now remembers the quilts that were hanging in the lobby when she checked in and quietly thanks "someone" for providing the distractions. The nurse asks D.M. about a drink and her favorite color, yellow, and asks a volunteer to bring a mug of coffee and a tote bag to the conference room. Inside the bag, D.M. finds a large lap quilt crafted from cheery, yellow

floral fabrics, a blank breast cancer journal, and a card.

This quilt was lovingly made for you by the hands of fellow breast cancer survivors, their friends, and families. Even though we did not know your name as the quilt was being created, you were in our thoughts as we stitched. It is our hope that this quilt will bring a smile to your face and warmth of the sun into your heart as you are wrapped in this quilt, and our wishes for your health and peace of mind.

With tears in her eyes, D.M. murmurs "thanks" and pulls the quilt to her, feeling a surge of emotional warmth.

## Nursing Assessment

The nurse is not certain the busy oncology clinic will allow time to provide the necessary support D.M. needs today and shares that concern with the nurse practitioner, who comes to the conference room and completes a patient consultation for the social worker. The nurse practitioner assesses the variety of emotional concerns D.M. verbalizes: fear of death, future care of loved ones, and anxiety related to treatment

decision making, bodily changes, and anticipated symptoms. D.M. expresses that the reality of the life-long vigilance associated with her cancer diagnosis coupled with the existence of her other challenging life circumstances is overwhelming. In a calm, unhurried manner, the nurse practitioner reassures D.M. that her feelings of dread are typical, yet can accentuate her fear and anxiety and create a sense of impending doom. The visceral reactions she reports, such as nausea and diarrhea, also are common. D.M. stops crying and is ready to talk about her treatment options. She is thankful for the calming skill of her oncology nurses and the personalized quilt that communicates a sense of supportive caring and warmth from her healthcare team. The nurse practitioner smiles inwardly because she just talked with a survivor who is involved in the quilt project and marvels at how that once anxious patient is now helping others during their peak time of emotional need.

## Etiology of the Problem

People have different emotional responses upon hearing they have cancer. Those responses are unique to their circumstances and usual coping skills.

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Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/09.CJON.723-725