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Meeting the supportive care needs of cancer patients

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Abstract

Individuals who are diagnosed with cancer experience more than a physical impact. There are emotional, psychosocial, spiritual, and practical consequences as well. While some individuals manage to cope successfully with the many changes, others experience on-going difficulty and emotional distress. If unchecked, this emotional distress can escalate and eventually interfere with problem-solving, adherence to treatment, and overall adjustment. The wide range of variation in coping behaviors and adaptation stages make selecting the correct intervention challenging. Clearly, astute assessment is required as the basis for developing a tailored approach to interventions.

If the supportive care needs of those living with cancer are to be met appropriately, intentional approaches are needed in busy clinical settings to identify, assess, and manage the distress. Without concrete efforts, the supportive care needs may easily be overlooked and the predominant focus of the health care team will remain on tumor assessment and treatment. Person-centered or whole person care will not be the focus of the team's interactions.

This presentation will outline the supportive care needs of cancer patients and summarize the evidence concerning the level of unmet need in cancer populations. Programmatic approaches to identify patient concerns and distress related to their supportive care needs, assess at a deeper level when necessary, and intervene based on relevant evidence will be discussed. Cancer centre need to be thinking about adopting programmatic approaches for this area of care as health service accreditation standards cite attention to supportive care needs of patients as a requirement within quality patient care.

Biography

Margaret I. Fitch completed her Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. She holds the positions of Head of Oncology Nursing and Supportive Care and Director of the Patient and Family Support Program at the Odette Cancer Centre and is associate Professor (Faculty of Nursing) and Professor (School of Graduate Studies) at the University of Toronto. She maintains an active research program in supportive care and publishes regularly. She is expert lead for the patient reported outcomes/survivorship at the Canadian partnership against cancer. She is also a past president of the International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care.

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