

A CUSTOMIZED TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR CONDUCTING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN CANCER CARE



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Background

- Difficult conversations in cancer care are frequent and the need to train learners is commonly acknowledged.
- The different emphases of Oncology learners from varied surgical and medical subspecialties pose a challenge for communications skills education within multidisciplinary cancer centers.
- We sought to provide an effective communications skills workshop customized to multiple Oncology disciplines

Methods

- A VitalTalk® curriculum, a national model for serious illness communication skills, was approved for learners from multiple specialties within Oncology.
- Workshops were co-facilitated by an Anesthesiologist and Psychiatrist with subspecialty in Palliative Care Medicine.
- An Oncology nurse actor was chosen as a patient simulator.
- Nine ½ day workshops were conducted, consisting of 4-6 learners each.

Curriculum

- Sessions included didactics, facilitated encounters using relevant clinical scenarios, discussion and debriefing.
- Facilitators and nurse actor met to establish learning objectives, craft cases, and determine actor responses customized to the individual trainees’ areas of Oncology before each workshop.
- Post-session evaluation forms were delivered to learners.

Participants (N = 40)	Fellows	25
	Residents	8
	Nurse Practitioners	5
	Faculty	2
Oncology Disciplines (N=10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blood and Marrow Transplant• Gynecology Oncology• Head and Neck• Internal Hospitalist Medicine• Neuro-Oncology• Ortho-musculoskeletal• Palliative Medicine• Radiation Oncology• Surgical Oncology• Urological Oncology	

Feedback

All participants agreed:

- Teaching strategies were effective in meeting learning needs.
- Content was relevant and met or exceeded expectations.
- Workshops provided specific tools and skillsets to improve comfort and competence to conduct challenging conversations.
- Sessions were highly interactive.
- Case scenarios were very authentic.

Conclusions

This communications skills workshop was successfully accepted and integrated in a Cancer Center’s educational curriculum by leveraging facilitator knowledge of specialty-specific challenges of trainees, making the cases discipline-specific, and utilizing the actor’s clinical experience.

Future Directions

In the coming academic year:

- Hematology and Medical Oncology Fellow participation (10)
- Study protocol to examine the intrinsic motivation of attendees to participate