



Nursing Competencies for Psychosocial and Symptom Management of Cancer Patients in Africa

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INTRODUCTION

The recognition is growing across Africa about the importance of psychosocial and symptom care for patients with cancer and their families.

Emerging research has reported high levels of unmet physical, emotional and practical needs associated with high distress experienced by patients.

Nurses are in an ideal position to provide emotional support, symptom management and basic psychosocial care to patients and families.

To provide quality supportive care, nurses must possess relevant knowledge and skills. African nurses have reported barriers to gaining the necessary education for psychosocial cancer care.

The existing nursing programs vary widely in the psychosocial content offered.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Oncology nurse experts collaborated to describe necessary competencies for African nurses in providing psychosocial care to patients with cancer and their families.

A literature review of patient and family unmet needs was conducted.

Existing standards and competency documents for oncology nursing and psychosocial practice were identified and gathered.

The experts reviewed all documents to identify competencies for specialty oncology nursing practice and aligned those relevant to the context of nursing practice in Africa.

RESULTS

Point of care in cancer trajectory	Key supportive care issues for patients with cancer in Africa that would benefit from nursing interventions
Prevention	Awareness about cancer, risk factors and cancer prevention strategies
Screening and early detection	Awareness of available screening and early detection options Fear of cancer; overcoming myths about cancer and cancer treatment Awareness of signs and symptoms that need investigation Where to go for investigation of symptoms Anxiety of waiting for test results
Diagnosis	Disbelief, emotional numbness, and shock of initial diagnosis Telling family members about the cancer Understanding the type of cancer, available treatment options, and implications of the treatments (e.g., prognosis) Making decisions about treatment
Treatment	Travelling and accommodation during treatment Financial concerns about treatment Coping with the treatment schedules and side effects Coping with changes in roles and responsibilities of family members Emotional reaction to treatment difficulties (e.g., anxieties, sadness, etc.) by patients and by various family members
Rehabilitation and survivorship	Awareness of late and long-term effects, when to seek help, and how to deal with them Adjusting to the changes in bodily function and appearance Finding available resources for support (emotional and practical) Making decisions about various aspects of life and priorities (e.g., return to school or work, roles in family) Coping with fear of recurrence and uncertainty about prognosis
Recurrent disease	Emotional reactions to diagnosis of disease again and its implications Awareness of implications of recurrent diagnosis and treatment options available Making treatment decisions Making decisions about life priorities
Advanced disease / end-of-life	Coping with side effects (especially pain) Confronting the end of life and anticipatory grief of patient and family members Finding hope and/or meaning in life as it remains Combating fear of being a burden and feelings of isolation
Bereavement	Family member coping with loss and grief

Nursing role in psychosocial care of patients with cancer
Defining psychosocial oncology (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The domain of psychosocial oncology includes the formal study, understanding and treatment of the social, psychologic, emotional, spiritual, quality of life ,and functional aspects of cancer as applied across the cancer trajectory from prevention through bereavement.
Standard of Care (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Comprehensive cancer care should ensure the provision of appropriate psychosocial health service by<ul style="list-style-type: none">>Facilitating effective communication between patients, their families, and care providers>Identifying psychosocial health needs of patients and families>Designing and implementing a plan that links the patient and family and psychosocial health care team, and engages and supports patients and families in managing their illness and health>Systematically monitoring, evaluating, and readjusting plans
Foundational knowledge and skills for nurses in psychosocial care of patient with cancer (2,3)
Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none">> Understand the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis and treatment on quality of life> Understand the evidence for intervention in psychosocial care> Aware of resources available in the local setting to assist with psychosocial care of patients and families> Aware of own role and the roles of other available health care professionals who can help with psychosocial care requirements
Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none">> Recognizing the signs and symptoms of psychosocial and spiritual distress> Completing a comprehensive patient assessment of all domains related to psychosocial care> Identifying patient perspective, strengths, weaknesses, and problems/concerns> Devising a mutually agreeable plan for psychosocial care with the patient and family members> Providing basic emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual care> Referring patient to available resources for identified problems/concerns> Monitoring the implementation of the plan of care> Evaluating the effectiveness of the plan of care and readjusting as required> Documenting assessment, interventions, and effectiveness of interventions> Communicating with the interdisciplinary team about patient condition, nursing intervention, and outcome of care

CONCLUSIONS

The competencies could serve as a basis for educational program planning and curriculum development as cancer nursing grows across Africa.

Both existing programs and new programs could use the competencies to incorporate relevant psychosocial knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Competencies for Post-basic Nurses in Supportive Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Understand the cancer experience and the different needs, feelings, fears, concerns and losses that the individua and family may encounter as part of the cancer journey and being able to discuss these topics comfortably with the individual and family members.Understand the basic support needs of patients and families and refer those with more complex supportive care needs (e.g., psychosocial, spiritual. symptoms)Recognize the importance of the interplay between individuals, families and community structuresUnderstand the impact stigma can have on the overall outcome of care and quality of life for patients and their family members/caregiversConduct a systematic supportive care assessment (e.g., symptoms, psychosocial, spiritual, cultural and practical) assessment that includes the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">> individual and family's response to cancer> their main concerns, feelings, fears, goals, and beliefs> understanding of cancer, treatment options, and prognosis> the individual and family supportive and informational needs> the patient's preferred role in decision-making> pre-existing mental health needs including therapies and outcomes> financial, social and practical concerns> rituals and practices that might affect their cancer experience> distress levels in patient and family members> who is at high risk and refer as necessary in a timely mannerApply supportive care strategies and best practice/evidence-based psychosocial interventions that are within the scope of nursing practice to facilitate copingDocument succinctly the individual/family perspective, reactions and responses, maintaining confidentiality but sharing what the interprofessional health care team needs to know to provide individualized careProvide relevant information and education at the appropriate times through the cancer experience related to common symptoms, psychological reactions and responses to the cancer experience. coping mechanisms, and psychosocial and spiritual care
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Be aware of one's own psychosocial distress and spiritual needs, and ways these differ from the patients' distressPractice effective strategies to decrease professional caregiver burden and prevent burnout

Additional competencies for the Advanced Nurses in Supportive Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conduct a thorough in-depth assessment and provide management interventions for symptom-related, psychosocial, and spiritual needsProvide advanced counselling techniquesProvide leadership in conducting family meetings to assess and manage care and relationship needsHold an in-depth understanding of evidence-based practice and clinical guidelines for management of symptoms, psychosocial and spiritual issues and the different models of spiritual and psychosocial careUndertake the management of advanced emotional and social difficulties for individuals diagnosed with cancerUnderstand the relationships between patients and family's spirituality and stages of griefCollaborate with interdisciplinary professionals to manage complex spiritual ad psychosocial care (e.g., African Palliative Care Association)Engage in systematic assessment of barriers to psychosocial and spiritual care as necessaryAssessing supportive and deleterious effects of interactions among individuals, caregivers, the community, and social systems on people at risk for, or diagnosed with, cancer throughout the care continuumLead quality improvement studies to enhance communication processes as necessaryAssist nursing staff in their development and maintenance of competency in the development of nursing diagnoses related to symptoms, and psychosocial and spiritual issuesAssist the post-basic nurse in the development and maintenance of evidence-based assessment skills with a focus on common cancer-related symptoms, psychosocial, and spiritual problem areas

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