

Journal Watch

Nurse Specialist Assessment and Management of Palliative Care Patients Who Are Depressed – A Study of Perceptions and Attitudes

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Abstract:

Depression is a frequent symptom in palliative care patients but is often not diagnosed. In the U.K., the majority of patients with advanced cancer are referred to a clinical nurse specialist (CNS) whose remit includes the assessment of psychological symptoms and depression. Clinical nurse specialists have a key role in the diagnosis and management of patients with depression and it is important that they have the skills to do so. A postal questionnaire of all U.K. hospital, hospice, and community palliative care clinical nurse specialist teams was carried out to determine how they assessed depression in their patients. The response rate was 40%. Seventy-nine percent of all clinical nurse specialists believed their skills were poor in this area, and 92% felt they required further training. These beliefs were substantiated by the difficulties nurses encountered in assessing depression and by their beliefs regarding antidepressant medication. Clinical nurse specialists have a pivotal role in improving the detection and management of depression in palliative care patients, and require further training in this area.

Comments:

Strengths/uniqueness:

- Well documented reasons for addressing the issue of depression
- Findings from the study can be used in other areas of health care given consideration of different training and attitudes towards depression
- Data collection focused on the real experiences and practices of the informants
- The study is easily followed
- Findings were compared to previous research on the subject of depression
- Highlights the differences of perception between groups in the study

Weaknesses:

- Credentials of researchers was not identified
- Questions were not clearly specified and seemed too general
- Depression was not clearly defined
- Did not know if the respondents remained anonymous thus affecting their responses, or if they understood the questionnaire and its purpose
- Follow-up and feedback documentation was not indicated
- Validity of tool was done by only 5 CNS
- Different cultural attitudes was not addressed

Relevance to Palliative Care:

- Depression is a significant symptom in palliative care patients, 1:4
- Palliative care consultants are pivotal in diagnosing and treating depression
- Difficulties were well documented in addressing depression in palliative care patients i.e. stigma, fatigue, counseling, caregivers perceptions
- Use of antidepressant therapy was discussed due to the patients short life expectancy
- Highlights the need for further training in assessing and treating depression
- Need for standardized tools to assess depression
- Need for further research in area of depression