CONCURRENT SESSION –
BREAST CANCER

CIVIC THEATRE

CARING FOR THE FAMILY: THE HEALTH PROFESSIONAL'S ROLE WHEN A YOUNG WOMAN HAS BREAST CANCER

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Introduction: The nurse has a pivotal role in caring for not only the young woman under fifty years with breast cancer but also her family support persons. The support role of the family is increasingly acknowledged by research however; the complexities of this role and how to support the family are not well understood. This research explored the important role of the family support persons and the resources they use to support themselves during their adjustment to breast cancer.

Method: This study used an exploratory descriptive design to explore the strengths (communication and coping strategies) and resources (community and medical resources) the woman and her family members use during treatment for breast cancer. A sample of 111 women and their family members completed questionnaires and 23 personal interviews were conducted to providing an inside view of how the family sees the role of the health professional.

Results: The quantitative results identified a close correlation between how the family sees the breast cancer and asking for help. The participants noted that breast cancer was a challenge and commitment to the family helped them through. The qualitative data provided the personal aspect of being cared for by the nurse, not knowing where to go for help and not wanting to ask for help.

Conclusion: It is important to include family in all aspects of the woman's care to ensure continued support and adjustment of the woman with breast cancer after discharge from acute treatment phase of breast cancer.