ONCOLOGY NURSES FAMILY ASSESSMENT PROCESSES: AN INVESTIGATION OF CURRENT PRACTICES.

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Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate the oncology nurse’s use of a family framework in the provision of family support. Family is the main source of support when an adult is diagnosed with cancer, although family members are often left out of the patient assessment process. The oncology nurse is the key point of contact for the patient and the family but may not have the time or expertise to conduct family assessments to inform adequate and appropriate support and guidance for family members.

Method

A descriptive study was used to examine oncology nurses practices in relation to family assessment. Focus groups [N=20] were conducted with the different levels of oncology nurses [N=50] across the three Queensland metropolitan hospitals. The focus group size depended on the constraints of the clinical areas. A thematic analysis was undertaken to identify common themes in the data.

Results

Family assessment was completed informally across the treatment period, often occurring when family rapport was established. Experience and time required to complete family assessment were highlighted as issues which influenced nurses’ ability to engage the family in the assessment process. Nurses felt their responsibility was to identify concerns and refer to allied health practitioners for follow-up.

Conclusion

Whilst family are included in discussions and general assessment by oncology nurses, this is often completed informally with little structure and documentation. The development of opening phrases and a structure for assessment could assist oncology nurses in the promotion of appropriate family support.

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