

Distress in Pediatric Oncology Patients and Their Family Caregivers: An Educational Initiative

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Statement of the Problem: A pediatric cancer diagnosis is significantly distressing. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network recognizes that distress screening is a standard of care, but little implementation exists across pediatric institutions.

Background: Search engines Google Scholar and Pub Med were utilized to review articles within the past 10 years. Literature shows that over 300,000 children are diagnosed with cancer each year, and more than half of these patients and their family caregivers will experience distress. Early identification of distress and subsequent support is a crucial component to enhancing coping ability, quality of life, treatment adherence, and overall psychosocial well-being.

Purpose: To assess nurses' comfort and understanding of distress in patients and family caregivers and determine effectiveness of a brief educational session.

Methods: In Fall 2022, a 20-minute educational session on distress was presented to nursing staff working on the oncology unit at Boston Children's Hospital. Nurses completed a brief 10-item pre/post survey to evaluate perspectives and effectiveness.

Findings: Forty-two nurses with an average of 9 years in practice completed the pre survey. The majority of respondents (82%) reported having never received education on distress. Mean scores for questions "Is distress well managed in our patients/family caregivers" were 2.45 and 2.32, respectively, on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Seventeen nurses completed the post survey, with similar mean scores (2.63/2.19) for the above questions. However, 100% of respondents endorsed that the education was helpful, and mean scores increased from 2.67 to 3.13 when asked about awareness of available resources for distressed patients and family caregivers.

Implications for Practice: A short in-service for inpatient pediatric oncology nurses is beneficial. There is a need for increased support in the identification and management of distressed patients and family caregivers.