per 100'000 women in 2002. Improvement in the treatment of breast cancer has decreased mortality of the patients, but at the same time fatigue is one of the most frequent and distressing symptoms reported by patients who receive chemotherapy. Fatigue is multicausal, multidimensional and subjective sensation. Thus, the challenge at present is to improve the assessment of fatigue during chemotherapy in order to develop fatigue coping strategies more individually.

The purpose of this study was to describe breast cancer patient's fatigue and fatigue coping strategies during chemotherapy. The fatigue level was evaluated through different aspects: subjective quantification of fatigue, subjective distress because of fatigue, subjective assessment of the effect of fatigue on chores/work and on pastimes/hobbies. In addition, the relationship between demographic and other background variables, fatigue and fatigue coping strategies was studied.

Material and methods: The sample (n = 69) consisted breast cancer patients of one university hospital in Finland. Inclusion criteria were: female breast cancer patient, chemotherapy, age over 18 years, Finnish speaking, no cognitive disabilities and informed consent. The response rate was 57%. Data were collected in 2004 by three parallel questionnaires. Patients were asked to fill in a health status information form, The Fatigue Diary, Ream et al. 2002 for seven days, and Standard Questionnaire, The Brief COPE, Carver 1997.

Results: The results showed that the fatigue level varied during chemotherapy. Breast cancer patients experienced more fatigue during third, fourth and fifth day of chemotherapy. On the fourth day, patients experienced fatigue and distress the most, and the effect of fatigue on chores/work and on pastimes/hobbies was highest. Patients used different coping strategies. Fatigue and coping strategies seem to be correlate with certain demographic factors. By employment status, patients on sick leave and out of employment were most fatigued. In particular, younger patients used coping strategies less than older patients. Childless patients were more fatigued and used coping strategies less than patients who had children.

Conclusion: The conclusion of this study is that by evaluating fatigue and coping strategies, more information about intermittent fatigue experiencing and coping strategies could be found. The results can be used to support breast cancer patients' individual coping strategies. Qualitative research will be needed in order to receive knowledge of patients' experiences and reasons for the use of certain coping strategies.

1614 POSTER

Internet cancer information: developing knowledge partnerships with patients and families

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The Internet is an important information source and support for people with cancer. Distinctive aspects of the Internet include 24-hour contact, individual ability to pace information according to need, and access to wide ranging professional and personal knowledge. There are also significant issues associated with Internet health information. Numerous studies report misleading information, significant information gaps and little reference to evidence based literature on some sites. The abundance of information on the Internet also requires searching and evaluation skills. Yet another issue is the unequal access to Internet resources as use is linked to household income and ethnicity and reflects broader patterns of societal discrimination.

In this presentation a case study is used to illustrate the strengths and the limitations of Internet health information for one form of cancer, along with recommendations and resources for supporting patients and families' effective Internet use. A critical first step is assessing patient and family knowledge at each point of contact. The development of resource sheets detailing appropriate Internet sites for people at different stages of cancer as a starting point for individual searches is also an important aspect of patient education. Short teaching sessions demonstrating effective searching skills may also be necessary.

At an institutional and policy level, nurses can promote freely accessible Internet facilities at strategic sites to enable better access for all people with cancer to this presently unequally distributed knowledge resource.

Nurses, and other health professionals with expertise in Internet resources and information retrieval, have a vital role assisting patients and families to evaluate Internet cancer information. Nurses can also identify information and access gaps and promote initiatives to reduce inequalities in the use of Internet resources.

1615 POSTER

Empathy – the key to quality care

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This study contributes to the understanding of empathy by considering its role in nursing practice, and its relationship to the context in which nursing takes place.

An ethnographic approach was used to explore the nature and meaning of empathy for nurses and patients on a 14 bedded, mixed sex oncology ward. Data were generated through participant observation and formal and informal interviews over a two year period; and analysed using a modified thematic analysis.

The findings suggest that empathy allowed nurses insight into the ways in which their patients experienced and coped with illness. Empathic understanding was generally associated with forms of problem solving and care planning that were valued by patients and found to be rewarding by nurses. Four different forms of empathy were identified, representing a continuum of empathy development. Moreover, the findings revealed the importance of the context in which nurses worked with regard to the expression of empathy. Empathy was most commonly expressed when staffing levels were high, nurses practised patient-centred care and were supported by other ward nurses and managers. The implications of these findings are discussed with particular reference to the knowledge nurses develop in practice and the ways in which nurses cope with stress and illness in the healthcare setting. In addition a new conceptualisation of empathy is proposed which enables a deeper understanding of empathy and accommodates the different ways empathy has been conceptualised in the past.

1616 POSTER

Involving patients and carers in the development of an electronic information management tool to support improvements in cancer care

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Managed clinical networks and new, systematic approaches to information and management are key modernisation components of the National Health Service in Scotland (Cancer in Scotland: Action for Change 2001, National eHealth / IM&T Strategy 2004). The South East Scotland Cancer Network (SCAN) brings together over 600 clinical staff, serving a population of 1.2 million people (from which about 8000 new cases of cancer are diagnosed each year). Working in partnership with patients, SCAN has developed a novel way to promote information sharing and help overcome the challenges of working across geographical, organisational, and professional boundaries. The SCAN Cancer Information Network (*www.scan.scot.nhs.uk*) aims to improve the quality of information for people affected by cancer in the SCAN region by reducing variation and improving the availability of quality-assured resources, including: virtual tours, diagnosis and treatment information leaflets, practical non-medical information, sources of support and web-links. It uses web technology to provide a single point of entry for professionals, patients, and carers to information about cancer and local services. Patients and carer involvement has been essential at each stage of the network's development. Working with the SCAN Patient Involvement Network, a programme of patient involvement is being implemented, including: usability testing; patients and carers (n = 12) assessed the usability of the network's prototype architecture through one-to-one structured interviews, the outcome of which was a technical development plan to inform the functionality and visual design of the release version of the network; content evaluation; a qualitative research study using paired interviews (n = 16) analysed the quality of content on the network, and is being used to inform future content development editorial input; a patient information editorial board will provide a forum for evaluating information resources, identifying gaps in information provision, commissioning new resources, and facilitate communication with health care professionals and key information providers. This presentation will reflect on the impact of patient involvement in developing the SCAN Cancer Information Network. It will consider both successes and barriers to effective patient involvement in this context and share lessons learned.

1617 POSTER

Involving patients and carers in cancer care research

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Background: The Cancer Care Research Centre is developing methods of involving patients and carers in the research process, with a particular focus on involving marginalised groups who are less likely to become involved.