

WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 1999

Teaching Lecture

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Cancer and its consequences on sexuality

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After many years working with cancer patients, I have learned that many of them, after receiving the diagnose of cancer and having to go through the treatment of it, are having problems coping with their sexuality. Simultaneously, I have also experienced that the patients' sexual problems are neglected in our health system. "Respect" for the patients' private life, fear to talk about this taboo-labelled topic, lack of time, and specialisation, may be some of the reasons why we tend to avoid to address this issue towards the patients. One of the main reasons for this neglect may be lack of knowledge – not only knowledge regarding the consequences of treatment, but also when it comes to our knowledge about communication skills.

The main objective for this lecture, is to recognise sexuality as a health issue for cancer patients. To achieve this, I will focus on the consequences – both physical and psychological – which the cancer diagnosis and the treatment of cancer may have on the patients' sexual health. Physical problems may occur as a result of hormone therapy, surgery, radiation therapy, and during chemotherapy. Patients also have to deal with psychological factors, such as altered self-image, crises related to loss, isolation and feelings of guilt and shame. During this talk I also intend to address how we as health professionals can promote sexual health among our patients, and discuss the use of The PLISSIT-modell in clinical situations.

Plenary Lecture

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Nursing care interventions based on theory and scientific evidence – Implications for justifying radiation oncology nursing practice

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The need for nursing practice to be based on research evidence has been on the professional agenda for radiation oncology nursing for the last decade. There seems however to be a frustration that practice is not changing as rapidly as warranted or in the direction that the research is suggesting. Today, in the 1990s many nursing practices in radiation oncology nursing are mainly based on experience, tradition, intuition, common sense and untested theories.

Evidence based nursing arises from the view that more and better evidence is needed to make better and more effective clinical decisions. This is held to be true whether the clinicians are doctors, nurses or any other healthcare professionals. There seems however to exist several blind spots about the nature of evidence in clinical decision making that needs to be addressed. In order for evidence to work in the clinical setting the evidence needs to be combined with clinical expertise. The medical profession and increasingly the nursing profession for evidence adopt randomized control trials, systematic reviews and meta-analysis as a gold standard. This type of studies represents a more rigorous attempt to answer the question what works in practice, thereby strengthening the evidence for or against an intervention.

Other robust experimental or observational studies or expert opinion are also needed to provide evidence. Practitioners need to use their clinical expertise to synthesize the best external evidence with their clinical experience. Clinical expertise is essential, without it practice may be overwhelmed by evidence that is inapplicable and inappropriate for the individual patient.

This paper will present findings from a review of radiation oncology nursing practice conducted in 1997–98 with the aim to determine the scientific base for delivering nursing care to patients receiving radiation therapy. The specific aim was to identify patient needs and to develop recommendations for delivering nursing care based on these findings.

The findings from the review indicate that radiation oncology nursing needs more information related to the specialty. Since it is a different world from medical oncology, it is not always appropriate or possible to use medical oncology to improve radiation oncology nursing practice. Theory generating and testing research is also needed to validate nursing knowledge, and for evidence based nursing knowledge to evolve.