

Introduction

Palliative Care Curriculum

For some individuals diagnosed with cancer, a cure will not be possible. Treatment and care in this case is directed toward palliation.

Palliative care is a form of comfort-giving care that recognizes cure or long-term control of disease is not possible. The primary aim of palliative care is quality of life. It is provided so that individuals who are dying from their disease can be helped to maintain the best possible level of physical, emotional, spiritual and social life during their remaining time, no matter how much limitation may exist because of their disease.

Palliative care, as a philosophy of care, uses a combination of active and compassionate therapies intended to comfort and support individuals and families facing life-threatening illness. It may be combined with treatments aimed at reducing or curing the illness, or it may be the total focus of care. Palliative care strives to meet physical, social, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs while remaining sensitive to personal, cultural, and religious values, beliefs and practices. Above all, palliative care focuses on living life to the fullest extent possible.

Providing palliative care successfully requires special knowledge and skill from a variety of health care professionals working collaboratively as an interdisciplinary team. Each team member has a role in paying close attention to controlling symptoms and providing psychosocial and spiritual support to both the patient and his or her family members.

Health care professionals involved in the provision of palliative care must receive appropriate education if they are to be effective in helping the person who is dying feel

supported and cared for. The education needs to include a range of topic areas and focus on skill development in communication, clinical assessment, ethical decision-making, and teamwork.

All cancer nurses, regardless of the setting in which they practice, need to be knowledgeable about palliative care. The depth of the knowledge they require will vary from setting to setting. For example, the nurse working in a cancer screening clinic may need to know what palliative care is as a philosophy of care while a nurse on a palliative care unit must know a great deal about managing pain and other symptoms, talking about death and dying, and providing emotional support. Whereas the former nurse may learn about palliative care through several lectures, the latter nurse requires a more in-depth, structured program or course of study.

This curriculum document was developed to give guidance to cancer nurses worldwide in planning and delivering educational programs about palliative for cancer patients. It was written by nurse experts in the specialty and provides a standard regarding education for cancer nurses. The document outlines the range of topics that comprises palliative care for cancer patients. Each topic area is described in sufficient detail so that educators will know what content is essential to teach learners.

It is anticipated this curriculum document will be used in various ways, either in part or in its entirety. The content for each topic is presented but the educator is expected to tailor the actual presentation to the needs of the learners. Educators might select a particular content area or topic from the curriculum and use any of the following presentation formats to help the learners:

- a lecture
- a workshop
- a course (short or long)
- a discussion group
- a presentation (paper or poster)
- a series of courses (program)

The degree of detail offered in each session will vary depending on the format and whether the educator has the objective of increasing awareness, enlarging knowledge, or enhancing skills in a particular topic.

In addition to continuing education or professional development purposes, the curriculum document could be used to guide the planning for undergraduate or graduate coursework. The depth of the discussion regarding specific topics with the learners will need to be adjusted or adapted to the expectations of the learners and their practice roles.

In closing, the authors of the curriculum document would be very interested in learning how nurses around the world have make use of this material and what any evaluations reveal. Please take a moment to let the ISNCC Secretariat know the following:

- what topic(s) did you use from the curriculum?
- what educational format(s) did you use?
- who were your participants or learners?
- what feedback did the participants offer regarding their learning at the end of the session?

- what practice changes occurred as a result of the participants attending the educational session?
- what long-term practice changes resulted?