Building a Collaborative Nursing Practice to Promote Patient Education: An Inpatient and Outpatient Partnership

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The oncology nursing staff of a large medical facility in the midwestern region of the United States identified that communication among nurses regarding education for patients with cancer often was disconnected between the inpatient and outpatient practices. Although excellent patient education was provided in both patient settings, the specialty-specific patient education messages often were unknown between practice areas. Ideally, as patients move among the institutions' various points of care, they should receive consistent information. The development of a formal partnership was essential to promote consistent communication and to ensure that standards of patient education are congruent between the two settings.

A team was formed to assist in identifying and implementing possible solutions to improve the communication issues surrounding specialty-specific patient education. The team was comprised of the hematology, oncology, and blood and marrow transplantation (BMT) clinical nurse specialist; a nursing education specialist whose role was to assist nurses with professional development and education; and three nurse educators representing the Cancer Education Program, an outpatient program charged with the task of meeting the educational needs of patients with cancer across the continuum of care, primarily accomplished through the operation of a Cancer Education Center.

After defining the problem of a lack of communication, the project team completed a literature search on nurse-to-nurse communication and collaboration. At the time the literature search was completed, information regarding nurses working and communicating with other disciplines, primarily physicians, was available; however, very little had been written pertaining to nurse-to-nurse collaboration or nurse-to-nurse communication. Tschannen (2004) studied collaboration and teamwork among healthcare professionals and found that the collaborative process resulted in positive patient outcomes, including a higher level of patient well-being and less fragmentation of care. Apker, Ford, and Fox (2003) also researched the effect of collaboration among nursing roles and reported positive outcomes, including supportive communication as well as trust in and appreciation for each other's roles in caring for patients throughout the continuum of care.

A concept analysis published by Henneman, Lee, and Cohen (1995) was particularly relevant as the team planned and defined the implementation of the collaborative nursing practice. The definition of collaboration in a healthcare setting is the "joint communicating and decision-making process with the expressed goal of satisfying patient wellness and illness needs while respecting the unique qualities and abilities of each professional" (Henneman et al., p. 104). The outcomes of collaboration include the development of a supportive and nurturing environment, reinforcement of worth and importance among staff, promotion of a "win-win" attitude, interprofessional cohesiveness, improved productivity and use of roles, increased employee satisfaction, and improved patient outcomes. Collaboration results in increased communication among groups, shared knowledge, practice integration changes, establishment of multidisciplinary standards, use of "we" versus "I" statements, and joint projects.

After completing the review of literature, the team realized the importance of establishing a pilot project that would enable them to evaluate the results of the collaborative efforts. The project was developed with the primary objective of building a collaborative nursing practice to promote patient education between the inpatient and outpatient areas.

Identifying Goals and Objectives

The first step in building a cohesive team to address collaboration was to identify goals and objectives. As the team worked to accomplish that, the members decided that, in addition to improving collaboration across various practice settings, the project should include an opportunity to promote professional growth. The planned project had two goals. The primary goal was to build a collaborative nursing practice between inpatient and outpatient practice settings that promoted a seamless, integrated process of meeting the educational needs of patients with cancer and their support people. A secondary goal was to provide a unique opportunity to enhance the inpatient hematology, oncology, and BMT nurses' professional development. Five objectives were identified.

- Increase awareness of the Cancer Education Center and the services and resources that are available to patients and their support people during the cancer experience.
- Continue to provide classes, information, and resources in a timely manner to patients from the hematology, oncology, and BMT departments