

Short Communication

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The Patient with Cancer and the Information

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ABSTRACT

The communication of information to cancer patients plays a critical role in their care and well-being. This editorial examines the importance of providing accurate and understandable information to newly diagnosed cancer patients. It analyzes how effective communication of diagnosis, prognosis, treatment options and possible side effects not only empowers patients in decision-making, but also provides them with emotional support. In addition, best practices are explored to adapt communication to the individual needs of patients, considering factors such as emotional state, comorbidities and personal preferences. This summary emphasizes the importance of empathetic and patient-centered communication to improve the quality of care and the experience of the cancer patient.

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Introduction

It is recommended that cancer patients know their diagnosis. Information about the diagnosis is important so that patients can participate in decisions about their treatment and care. However, the way in which the diagnosis is communicated and the amount of details provided must be adapted to the individual needs and desires of the patient, and this process must be guided by a health professional with experience in communicating sensitive medical news.

How to Communicate?

The communication of the cancer diagnosis must be handled with sensitivity and empathy. Here are some general guidelines:

1. Establish a suitable environment: Choose a private and quiet place to talk to the patient, where they can talk without interruptions.
2. Use clear and understandable language: Avoid medical jargon and use simple language to explain the diagnosis and any relevant information.
3. Show empathy and support: Be understanding and offer emotional support. Listen to the patient's concerns and answer their questions patiently.
4. Provide information gradually: Do not overwhelm the patient with too much information at once. Provide the essential details and offer more information as the patient needs it.
5. Provide resources: Offer written information or additional resources, such as support organizations or patient groups, so that the patient can get more information and support if they wish.
6. Involve relatives if necessary: If the patient wishes, allow relatives or loved ones to be present during the communication of the diagnosis.
7. Respect the patient's preferences: Some patients want to know all the details, while others may prefer limited information. Be sure to adapt the communication according to the patient's preferences.

8. Offer hope and options: Despite the severity of the diagnosis, provide information about treatment options and prospects, always being realistic but also encouraging when possible.

Degree of Detailed and Reliable Information

The amount of details that should be provided to the cancer patient depends on their individual preferences and their level of comfort. Some patients want to know all the details, while others may be overwhelmed by too much information. Here are some general guidelines:

1. Ask the patient: Before providing information, ask the patient how many details they want to know and how they prefer the information to be communicated to them. Some may say "tell me everything," while others may prefer an initial overview.
2. Provide essential information: Always provide the essential details that the patient needs to know, such as the type of cancer, its stage and the available treatment options.
3. Graduality: In general, it is a good practice to start with the basic information and then allow the patient to ask questions to obtain more details if they wish.
4. Answer questions: Be prepared to answer the patient's questions in an honest and understandable way. Don't hide important information.
5. Listen to the patient's signals: Observe the patient's reactions and adjust their communication accordingly. If they seem overwhelmed or emotionally disturbed, it may be necessary to slow down the communication of additional details.
6. Offer written information: Provide written information or brochures about the diagnosis and treatment, so that the patient can review them in their own time.

Information communication must be a flexible process and adapt to the individual needs and desires of the patient. A balance must always be sought between providing the necessary information and respecting the patient's ability to assimilate it.

Level of Truthfulness in Communication

The communication of the truth in the diagnosis and prognosis of cancer is a fundamental ethical principle in medical care. However, the way in which this information is communicated must be adapted to the needs and desires of the patient, as well as their ability to understand and assimilate the information.

Here are Some Important Considerations:

1. **Diagnosis:** In general, doctors are expected to inform the patient about their cancer diagnosis. Hiding or falsifying a diagnosis is unethical and can undermine the patient's confidence in the health care system.
2. **Forecast:** The communication of the forecast must be honest and based on the available evidence. However, the way you communicate may vary depending on the patient. Some patients want to know precise details about their prognosis, while others may prefer a more general understanding.
3. **Survival:** Information about life expectancy or survival must also be communicated honestly, but it is important to note that the forecasts can be uncertain and vary according to many factors. Doctors must provide a realistic picture and be open to answering questions.
4. **Toxicity of treatments:** Doctors must inform patients about the possible side effects and toxicity of the proposed treatments so that they can make informed decisions about their care. This allows the patient and the medical team to work together to manage any side effects.

Truth and honesty are fundamental in medical communication, but the way information is communicated must be personalized according to the needs and preferences of the patient. Health professionals must be sensitive and empathetic when addressing sensitive issues such as the diagnosis, prognosis and survival of cancer. They must also be available to answer questions and provide emotional support.

Legal Aspects

The legal obligation of health professionals to communicate medical information, including diagnosis and prognosis, varies according to the laws and regulations of each country and state. However, in many countries, there is a legal and ethical expectation that health professionals will provide truthful and complete information to patients.

For example, in the United States, it is governed by the Patient Privacy Rights Act and the Health Insurance Responsibility and Portability Act (HIPAA). HIPAA establishes specific rules on the privacy and security of patient's medical information, but does not prevent health professionals from communicating the diagnosis and relevant information to the patient.

In addition, medical organizations, such as the American Medical Association, have ethical guidelines that emphasize the importance of truthful and complete communication with patients. Ultimately, if there is a doubt about the specific legal obligations in a given place, it is advisable to consult a lawyer specialized in health law or review local regulations for precise guidance.

Legal Situation in Argentina

In Argentina, the National Law on Patient Rights (Law 26,529) regulates several aspects related to medical information and the rights of patients. Some of the most relevant points of this law include:

1. **Right to information:** Patients have the right to receive complete, clear, accurate and adequate information about their health status, diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. This includes information about any medical procedure that will be performed on them.
2. **Informed consent:** The law establishes the importance of informed consent, where the patient has the right to give or reject their consent for any medical procedure after receiving detailed information about it.
3. **Confidentiality:** Health professionals have the obligation to maintain the confidentiality of the patient's medical information, except for exceptions provided by law.
4. **Access to the medical record:** Patients have the right to access their medical record and to request copies of it. They can also request that inaccurate or irrelevant information be modified or removed.
5. **Rights of people with disabilities:** The law establishes specific rights for people with disabilities, including the right to receive information in a format accessible to them.

A case of justice intervention related to medical information and patient rights occurred in Argentina. This case is known as the "Maradona Case" and refers to the death of the famous soccer player Diego Maradona in November 2020. The case generated a debate about the medical care provided and the medical information provided to the patient.

The medical team that treated Maradona was the subject of a legal investigation and raids were carried out in their homes and workplaces. The Argentine justice system sought to determine if there was medical negligence in Maradona's care and if adequate information was provided to the patient and his family.

This case highlights the importance of transparency in medical care and the need to ensure that patients receive complete and accurate information about their health and treatment. It also illustrates how justice can intervene when there are concerns about medical care and patients' rights. In similar cases, laws and regulations related to medical care and patient rights are expected to be investigated and applied.

It is important to keep in mind that the laws may vary in different provinces of Argentina, so it is advisable to consult the local regulations for more specific information. In addition, medical practice in Argentina generally follows international ethical and legal principles that support the communication of accurate medical information and the protection of patients' rights.

Conclusion

In summary, the communication of the cancer diagnosis is a delicate process that involves balancing honesty with empathy and sensitivity to the patient's needs and desires. Here are some key conclusions:

1. **Honesty:** Health professionals have the ethical responsibility to communicate the truth about the cancer diagnosis, prognosis and treatment options.
2. **Adaptation:** The way in which information is communicated must be adapted to the emotional state and the physical and psychological comorbidities of the patient.
3. **Emotional support:** Providing emotional support is essential, especially when faced with cancer diagnoses. Patients may need guidance and support to deal with emotions.

4. Respect for the patient's preferences: It is important to respect the patient's preferences regarding the amount of information they want to receive and how they want to be communicated to them.

5. Teamwork: Effective communication of cancer diagnosis often involves a team of health professionals, including doctors, psychologists and other specialists.

Ultimately, the communication of the cancer diagnosis must be a patient-centered process that balances the medical truth with the emotional support necessary to help the patient make informed decisions about their care and face the diagnosis effectively.

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