

STANDPOINT

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Pursuant to Order of the Rector of Medical University-Varna No. R-109-119/ 15.02.2023, I have been elected as a member of the Scientific Jury, and on the basis of Protocol No. 1/ 28.02.2023, I have been appointed to prepare a standpoint on the procedure for acquiring an educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the field of higher education 7. Health care and sports, professional field 7.4 Public health, PhD program "Health care management".

Regarding dissertation work on the topic: "Optimizing health care in oncological patients through distress assessment"

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1. Importance of the issue, formulation of the goal, tasks and hypotheses

The increasing frequency of oncological diseases, the significant progress in the development of medical science, the implementation of new diagnostic and therapeutic options lead to new challenges in the processes of treatment, care and follow-up of oncological patients. The role of the oncology nurse in these processes is increasingly decisive, building a relationship with patients and their relatives during treatment largely depends on good qualifications and professional training.

The studies of distress in oncological patients are increasing recently. Various assessment scales are created, factors influencing the development of this condition are analyzed, such as the stage of the disease, localization of the neoplasm, social and family status, gender, age, religious affiliation and etc.

Because of the negative impact it could have on the individual therapeutic plan, patient's quality of life and the effect of treatment, the assessment of distress and the possibilities to influence it are part of the overall care of patients with oncological disease. The oncological nurse participates in this process, in addition to her high professional skills related to performing manipulations, as well as her skills to communicate with the patient and his relatives, to assess the physical, emotional and psychological problems and needs of oncological patients before, during and after completing their active treatment. The outcome of the treatment process often depends on the manifestations of empathy, compassion and empathy, as they determine the patient's attitude towards his own future - the desire to live, willingness to participate and help in the treatment, performance and readiness to deal with unwanted events in the course of treatment - side effects (alopecia, skin toxicity, problems related to nutrition and many others).

All this has led to the definition of a specific goal: "To identify and assess the level of distress in oncological patients with a view to optimizing health care". Eight tasks are clearly formulated that serve the purpose and hypotheses of the study.

2. Structure of dissertation work

The presented dissertation contains 186 pages, of which "Introduction" - 2 pages, "Literature review" - 44 pages, "Methodology and organization of the scientific study" - 11 pages, "Results and discussion" - 87 pages, "Practical approaches to optimize the professional activity of the oncological nurse in patients with distress" - 8 pages, "Conclusions, recommendations and contributions" - 4 pages, "Conclusion" - 3 pages, "Scientific publications and participations in connection with the dissertation work" - 1 page.

The dissertation work is illustrated with 8 tables and 66 figures, there are 6 appendices.

The list of references includes 226 titles, of which 56 are in Cyrillic and 170 are in Latin.

The structure of the dissertation work is well balanced and ordered. Individual sections have a logical sequence and complex content. The scientific work meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria.

3. Literary awareness

The PhD student presents an in-depth analysis based on a large body of literature. Data are presented on the epidemiology, modern diagnostics and the main modalities used in the treatment of oncological diseases - surgery, radiation therapy, various types of drug treatment, the sequential and combined application of the various treatment methods, the adverse side effects occurring during the active treatment.

Various scales for assessing anxiety, definition of the concept of "Distress", the frequency of occurrence of this condition when an oncological diagnosis is made, the possible adverse effect of distress on adherence to the multidisciplinary treatment path of the patient are presented. The characteristics of distress, placing it among today's significant medico-social problems, requiring the development of screening programs for its early recognition and prevention.

As separate sections, the role of the nurse in the fight against oncology is distinguished - during active treatment, palliative care, care for dying people, care for the family at the time of death, ethics in the care of cancer patients, etc.

4. Research Design and Methodology

Results of a study on the assessment and analysis of distress among cancer patients are presented. The object of the study are patients with histologically verified oncological disease, referred for treatment to the Medical Oncology Clinic of University Multi-profile Hospital for Active Treatment Sveta Marina EAD-Varna, members of the families of these patients and nurses working in the CMO (a total of 597 respondents, distributed in three groups). Three logical units are formed, with clearly formulated signs. All subjects met inclusion criteria and no exclusion criteria for each subgroup. The study was carried out in eight stages, with the instrumentation, location and period of implementation presented in a table in the dissertation.

The methods used for statistical processing of the obtained results are described in detail.

5. Correspondence between objective, results and conclusions

There is a correspondence between the set goal, the formulated eight tasks and the obtained results. Based on the set goal and the data from the studied literature, three hypotheses were formulated. The data from the conducted research are presented in tables and figures. The obtained results demonstrate the correlations between the level of distress and age, sex, the localization of the oncological disease and the general condition, assessed by the ECOG scale, lack of correlation between the level of distress and the stage of the disease, place of residence, etc. The relationship between practical, family, the emotional and physical problems and the level of distress. The factors influencing the distress levels of patients' relatives are presented. An analysis of the results of nurses' participation in the study is demonstrated.

6. Analysis of conclusions and contributions

Eight conclusions are formulated, synthesizing the most important of the obtained results. The conclusions are specific and clear.

Recommendations to medical universities and medical institutions regarding the training of nurses and the implementation of the Distress Thermometer in clinical practice with the aim of assessing distress and optimizing care for oncological patients are also made.

Among the main contributions of the dissertation are the following;

- for the first time in Bulgaria, the relationship between the levels of distress in oncological patients and the assessment of their daily life and communication with their loved ones is analyzed using the Distress Thermometer

- a targeted and in-depth study of distress levels in oncological patients using the Distress Thermometer;

- for the first time in Bulgaria, the levels of distress in relatives of patients with oncological disease are assessed;

- the role of the nurse in the assessment of distress in cancer patients and the possibilities of applying the Distress Thermometer and the assessment of their problems are outlined;

- practical guidelines for optimizing nursing care for patients with distress and the possibilities for their integration into clinical practice are proposed;

- Stages for evaluating patients with distress have been developed.

The PhD student presents three scientific publications related to the dissertation work.

The abstract comprises 83 pages, and it contains all the main chapters of the dissertation work.

7. Conclusion

Martina Stoyanova Ivanova's dissertation is an in-depth scientific study dedicated to an important, not always recognizable and appreciated medico-social problem of increasing importance in modern oncology as part of the overall care for oncological patients. The topic is current, extensive and complex. The methods applied in the study are relevant to the stated

goals and objectives, the results are unambiguous, the conclusions are clearly formulated. There are contributions of theoretical and clinical value.

The dissertation work on the subject "Optimization of health care for oncological patients by assessing distress" covers the indicators for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "PhD". It meets the requirements of the law on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation.

Based on all of the above, I give a positive assessment to the dissertation work of Martina Stoyanova Ivanova and propose to the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury that she be awarded the educational and scientific degree "PhD".

The standpoint is elaborated by: assoc. prof. Eleonora Georgieva Dimitrova Gospodinova, MD.

