

Palliative Care Nursing: Opportunity and Challenges



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Abstract

Palliative Nursing is an emerging field of nursing. Hospice and palliative care nursing reflects a holistic philosophy of care. Palliative care provide physical, emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual care. The approach of care has been incorporated throughout the course of disease rather than only at the end of life care. Dedicated palliative care nurses enable the patient and families to achieve the sense of well being and higher quality of life. Caring the patient at palliative care provide both challenges and opportunities. Palliative care nursing has a bright future although the speciality is still young.

Palliative Care

The term “**Palliative Care**” is increasingly used with regard to diseases other than cancer such as chronic progressive pulmonary disorders, renal disease, chronic heart failure, and progressive neurological conditions. World Health Organization defines Palliative Care as “an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life threatening illness through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, impeccable assessment and management of pain including, other problems: physical, psychosocial, and spiritual”.

The successful palliative care requires attention to all aspects of a patient’s suffering: physical, psychological, social, economical, spiritual, and cultural so on which requires involvement of all multidisciplinary team. Teamwork is an integral part of the philosophy of palliative care. Interdisciplinary palliative care team includes Doctor, Nurse, Counselor, Psychologist, Volunteer, Dietician, Physiotherapist, Occupational therapist, and Religious therapist. Effective teamwork depends on good communication, effective leadership, and co-ordination within the team. Usually nurses has to play key role among the team member of palliative care.

Palliative Nursing

The term “**Palliative Nursing**” was introduced only after 1989 and now it has been recognized as a distinct nursing specialist with diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate programs. The palliative care nursing believes, the *value of life and death as a natural process*. Nurses spend more time with patients who are facing the end of life compare to other

member of the team. In hospice, nurses have been recognized as the cornerstone of palliative care, and it is increasing also in other setting of palliative care. The Palliative care nursing is unique because it intervenes at the time of diagnosis and remains consistent through initial curative intervention to the bereavement.

According to International Council of Nursing (ICN) “the nurse’s role as fundamental to a palliative approach that aims to reduce suffering and improve the quality of life for dying patients and their families through early assessment, identification and management of pain and physical, social, psychological, spiritual and cultural needs”. Therefore, the role of the palliative nursing is to assess the needs of the patients and family and plan, implement and evaluation of appropriate interventions. Its aims are to improve the quality of life and to enable dignified death. Doctors’ role is focused on curing and treatment oriented where as the nurses’ role is seen as caring and supportive, which become dominant when the person is dying.

Competency in Palliative Nursing

Palliative care specialist requires a high level of professional skills. Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) have key roles in the care of patients who are nearing death and those living with a chronic disease.

Palliative Care Specialist

Nurse has a vital role to alleviate pain and suffering with chronically and people at the end of life. There are different level of competecies in palliative nursing as a speciality.

1. **Level 1:** Competencies expected of all the nurses working at any field of clinical nursing (medical/surgical nursing and care of the elderly and so on)
2. **Level 2:** Competencies expected of all nurses working within the specialty of palliative care.
3. **Level 3:** Competencies expected of advanced practitioner in palliative care (Nurse Practitioner)

Roles of the Advanced Practice Nurse in Palliative Care

In addition to direct involment in care of dying patients, palliative care Advanced Practice Nurse (APNs in palliative care) ane involved in a variety of other roles:

1. Designers of innovative practices for end-of-life care in a variety of settings.
2. Educators of and consultants for other clinical nurses, medical students, nursing students and other care providers.
3. Researchers who make important contributions to the profession.
4. Administrators within health care systems, institutions and clinical education programs

Opportunities of Palliative Nursing

1. Palliative Nursing is emerging field of nursing. The approach of care has been incorporated throughout the course of chronic, progressive, incurable disease rather than only at the end of life care. So, the scope is broad.

2. The scope of palliative care nursing is continuously evolving as the science and art of palliative care development.
3. Providing end-of-life care is presented as a key function of nursing that can bring about positive benefits for patients and families. The quality of care during the end stage of life greatly contributes to peaceful and dignified death and provides support to family members in dealing with their loss and grieving process.
4. Teamwork is an integral part of the philosophy of palliative care. It is the nurse who serves as a primary liaison between the team, patient, and family members.
5. Because of the close proximity of the nurse to the patient and family through day-to-day observation and care, there is often a shift in the balance of decision making at the end of the life from physician to the nurse.
6. Hospice and Palliative Care Nurses Association was developed in 2008 with high quality of newly approved research agendas, creative educational products and programs and additional benefits for the members.
7. Nurses have a key role in developing national guidelines on the availability, prescription and safe storage of opioid and other drugs used in palliative care.

Challenges in Palliative Nursing

Working to provide a peaceful and comfortable death is seen as rewarding as well

as challenging. Continuously working with terminally ill and dying patients can lead to role strain, conflict, and burnout. Nurses are reminded to be aware of their own feelings and to take care of themselves emotionally as well as physically.

Challenges faced by the nurses working in palliative care are:

1. Issues of death and dying are highly emotional human experiences. Facing the reality of death is traumatic for the nurses as well.
2. A key aspect of palliative care is effective pain management and control. One of the main challenges is access to pain medication, especially opioid. Unaffordable, unavailability and legal issues of opioid are common problems faced by the nurses.
3. Lack of specialized and trained nurses is another challenge to work in the field of palliative care
4. Poorly developed multidisciplinary palliative care team facing various problems to deal with the patient and families as a big challenge.
5. Team conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, interpersonal conflict, inadequate communication and leadership dilemmas are well recognized challenges faced by the nurses while working in the team.
8. Other challenges include restrictive nursing practice acts that limit nursing functions in prescribing medicines for pain control (nurses are unauthorized to prescribe pain medication) drugs used in palliative care.

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