

Emotional Reaction of Adult Patients with the Diagnosis of Cancer

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An Exploratory study was undertaken which aimed at studying the emotional reactions of adult patients with the diagnosis of cancer admitted for Radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy. The interest for the study was derived from experiences of the investigator with the patients dying of cancer. It was the hope of the investigator that the facts revealed in this study would lead to a greater understanding of and improvement in the emotional aspect of care of patients with cancer.

The purpose of the study was to obtain information which would be of value in identifying the emotional needs of patients with cancer, the awareness of which may guide the nurse in meeting these needs.

Most people associate cancer with a slow, painful death. Part of the dread connected with cancer results from the fact that no definite cure has been possible so far. More frequently than in any other disease, the physician hesitates to disclose to the patient his diagnosis. All this unfamiliarity connected with this disease plus the secretiveness about the diagnosis may magnify the patient's fears. Moreover, in modern cancer therapy it may happen frequently that extensive surgery and radiation may produce changes that are disfiguring or mutilating to which people may react with a lot of stress.

Surgery for cancer may offer some hope of cure. Radiation therapy or chemotherapy on the other hand is viewed by many as a last resort of treatment for cancer. Hence the fear and anxiety of

patients undergoing these forms of treatment may be intensified. No matter how the patient reacts to the diagnosis of cancer, yet present deep down are all the anxieties and fears.

Need for the Study :

The trend in nursing today is toward "comprehensive care" or "total patient care" which concept recognizes and embraces all aspects of individual care. Studies done to know the psychological impact of cancer and its surgical treatment on patients revealed depression, guilt feelings, anxiety and fear, denial and repression to be the predominant factors. It is during such times of stress that the patient needs psychological support.

The nurse, of all medical personnel has the continuous contact with the patient during his hospitalization, her share in the healing process reaches far beyond ministering to the biological needs of the patient. Psychological needs demand as much attention and skill from the nurse as the physical needs.

In providing patient care today, the nurse has the responsibility of assisting the patient in meeting his emotional needs. This may be her major responsibility specially in caring for chronically ill or terminally ill patients.

Cancer is considered to be a terminal illness and one in which the psychological trauma is great. Therefore, the patient with cancer needs emotional support in greater measure.

Methodology :

The sample for the study consisted of 12 patients of which two were females. Five were Hindus, six Christians and one Muslim. The range of age and educational

status was as follows :

28-52 years

4th class to Ph. D.

All these patients were aware of the diagnosis of cancer.

The methods used for the study were observation and questioning. The techniques used were participant observation, interview, critical incidence technique and psychological assessment. Observation check list, interview guide, and anecdotal records were the tools used. The tools were pretested and refined before use for actual study.

The selected patients were observed for an hour on alternate days over a period of twelve days during which time they were interviewed also. During the time of observation the investigator assisted in giving care to the patients. The nursing personnel responsible for the care of the selected patients reported on the critical incidents at times other than the set time of observation. The findings of Rorschach test added more information to the study.

Some important findings of the study :

Five out of twelve patients showed "acceptance" of the disease when they heard of the diagnosis for the first time.

The frequently observed behaviours were depression and elation. The average number of days of manifestation of depression was high as compared to that of elation.

The behaviour manifestation of depression was more frequently observed in the elder age and below S.S.L.C. group, and that of elation in the younger age and above S.S.L.C. group.

From the test of significance the following were evident :—

There is no association between age and behaviour manifestation of depression and elation.

There is no association between time and behaviour manifestation of depression and elation.

There is association between educational level and behaviour manifestation of depression and elation.

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