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Review Article

ONCOLOGY NURSE NAVIGATOR PROGRAMME - A NARRATIVE REVIEW

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Abstract:

Introduction : Cancer Care is complex and often requires multiple health care professionals to work in a coordinated and integrated fashion to deliver most effective care available. A team based approach from surgeons, medical oncologists, radiologists, nurse specialists and social worker is required to ensure quality and continuity in care. Specific nursing roles in cancer services are expanding and evolving.

Objective : To explore the role of nurse as navigator in oncology care.

Methodology : Literature survey was conducted from published journals, text books and online databases (CINAHL, Pubmed, Proquest, Ovid, Medline and Science direct) from January 2000 to January 2014 by using terms pivot nurse ,oncology nurse, case manager, nurse navigator ,patient navigator, oncology nurse navigator along with terms oncology or cancer care.

Results : Literature review on nurse navigator programme reveals positive outcomes in various aspects of cancer care, but lack of consensus in study population, intervention settings, outcome measures and methodologies have been noted.

Conclusion : Patient navigation using nurses is viewed as an effective strategy to improve standard of oncology care delivered. This review provides evidence that nurse navigator programme can improve specific patient outcomes in cancer care.

Keywords : patient navigation, nurse navigator, cancer care, patient outcomes

Introduction :

Cancer is a huge global health burden; touching all region and people from different socioeconomic level. [1] Continuum of cancer care spans a lengthy trajectory from initial diagnosis through treatment.[2] Cancer care is complex and usually requires a team based approach from multiple health professionals to ensure quality and continuity in care. Coordination of cancer care has gained increased attention recently because it can critically and positively affects patient safety as well as care quality across different services and settings.[3] Nurses have a major role in cancer patients' care and many specific nursing roles in cancer services are expanding and evolving. Certain specific nursing roles and its application in cancer care have been tested in a few countries. A primary literature search reveals lack of published literature/studies from India. Hence the objective of this review is to explore the emerging role of nurse as navigator in oncology care.

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Methodology :

Literature survey was conducted from published journals, text books and online databases (CINAHL, Pubmed, Proquest, Ovid, Medline, Science Direct) from January 2000 to January 2014 .Since nurse navigation is a new term the key words used were oncology nurse, pivot nurse, case manager, patient navigator, nurse navigator, oncology nurse navigator along with terms oncology or cancer care.

Literature review

Literature review is organized under following headings

- Concept of Patient Navigation
- Role of oncology nurse
- Oncology nurse navigator
- Effectiveness of patient/nurse navigation programme

Concept of patient navigation

The word *navigate* is derived from two Latin words - *Navis (ship) and agree (to drive).*

The meaning of word navigate is to travel over or through safely.[4] Navigation is a process whereby a patient is given personalized care and support across the continuum of cancer care. [5] The first patient navigation programme was created by Harold P. Freeman at Harlem Hospital, New York in 1990 and thereafter the model continues to evolve and expand. [6] Patient navigator programmes share characteristics with case management and it is focused on a range of health care needs and issues.[7] The model focuses on meeting the needs of patients such as providing disease and treatment related information and support and linking with other health care professionals. It is noted that services provided include detection of cases, identification of barriers to care, development and implementation of care plan and tracking throughout treatment and its completion.[8]

Role of oncology nurse

Nurse's role as a care provider, manager, principal educator and advocate has developed over many years. Oncology nurses are remarkably involved in education of patients, their families, peers and public. They provide patients with information about disease, management of side effects, nutritional care, emotional coping and other skills that can be developed and nurtured. Oncology nurses are suitable for this task because of their greater knowledge and understanding of various aspects of cancer care.[9] Patients need a qualified nurse to provide information and education about their care, manage their needs and problems from diagnosis through treatment and survivorship and help them to develop coping mechanisms.[10]

Oncology nurse navigator

The term nurse navigator has introduced to the oncology health care setting in recent years but seems to continue to fall under the broad heading of patient navigator.[11]The national comprehensive cancer network (2011) stated that the patient navigator is most often a nurse and used the term patient navigation interchangeably with case manager.[12] The Oncology Nurse Navigator is a professional whose clinical nursing expertise guides patients, families and their caregivers in informed decision-making; collaborating with a multi-disciplinary team , allow for timely cancer screening, diagnosis, treatment, and supportive care across the cancer continuum.

(The National Coalition of Oncology Nurse Navigators, NCONN).[13] The role of a patient navigator includes some aspects of case management, advocacy, patient education and social work .[14] But the Navigator role goes beyond minimal function of a case manager or a patient advocate Navigators oversee the treatment process ,provide information and support to the patient, link with other professionals in treatment process and act as a single, constant contact. It is a more widely used term in addressing problems related to integration, coordination and continuity of cancer care, and is fit in with the concept of a holistic approach that centres on the quality of life of the person with cancer. Nurse navigator role has been implemented in different health care settings and is helpful to the multidisciplinary team for continuum of patient care from diagnosis to survivorship.[15] Specific roles of nurse navigator in cancer care is illustrated in Figure 1

Effectiveness of patient/nurse navigation programme

A randomized controlled trial conducted by Myriam Skrutowski et. al revealed the impact of a pivot nurse in decreasing Symptom distress, fatigue and improving QOL in patient with lung and breast cancer.[16]

A systematic review conducted by Robinson et al on patient navigation in breast cancer reported that adherence to cancer care enhanced with patient navigation.[17]

A descriptive study conducted by Swanson J on oncology

nurse navigator's role in management of distress revealed that visits of navigator have a statistically significant effect on inpatients' distress scores (p=0.044).[18]

Carrol JK in a qualitative study with 35 Breast and colorectal cancer patients tried to explore Patients experiences with navigation. The results of study reveal that Navigated patient received emotional support and assistance with informational needs, problem solving and coordination of cancer care.[19]

Case B conducted a systematic review to explore impact of oncology nurse as navigator on specific patient outcomes revealed that nurse navigator programme showed positive outcomes related to time of diagnosis, different mood states, support and continuity of care ,patient satisfaction and cost outcomes.[20]

In a randomized controlled trial Kevin Fiscella et al revealed that patient navigation has improved satisfaction with care in breast and colorectal patients.[21]

Few studies have been illustrated in the form of a methodological matrix in Table 1

Table 1 : Studies on Patient Navigation/Nurse Navigation in Cancer Care

Author & Year	Aim	Study Variables	Design	Sample and Sample size	Major Findings
Ann Hook 2012	Explore patient satisfaction in newly diagnosed breast cancer patients	Patient satisfaction	Non experimental, descriptive study	103 patients in rural community setting	72% satisfied with NN
Carrol JK 2010	Explore Patients experiences with navigation	Navigation care	Qualitative	35 Breast and colorectal cancer patients	Navigated patient received assistance with informational needs, problem solving, emotional support and cancer care coordination
Robinson et al 2010	Evaluate outcome of navigation in breast cancer care	Screening, diagnosis, treatment	Systematic review	Studies from 1990-2009	Evidence supports patient navigation has improved many aspects of breast cancer care
Case B 2010	Explore impact of oncology nurse as navigator on specific patient outcomes	Time of diagnosis, support and continuity of care, mood states, satisfaction and cost outcomes	Systematic review	18 studies	Positive outcomes in time of diagnosis, support and continuity of care, mood states, satisfaction and cost outcomes
Swanson J 2010	Determine role of ONN in distress management	Distress scores	Descriptive study	55 in patients with cancer	Patients seen by ONN Shows lower distress scores
Fiscella k 2008	To assess Time of completion of treatment, satisfaction with care, psychological distress	Time of completion of treatment, satisfaction with care, psychological distress	RCT	438 breast and colorectal cancer patients	No statistical difference in completion of treatment, high satis faction, less psychological distress
Skrutowski M, 2008	Examine presence of pivot nurse in relieving symptom distress, fatigue, improve QOL and use of health resources	fatigue, symptom distress, QOL and use of health resources	RCT	113 patients with breast and lung cancer	No significant difference in Symptom distress, fatigue, QOL and use of health resources

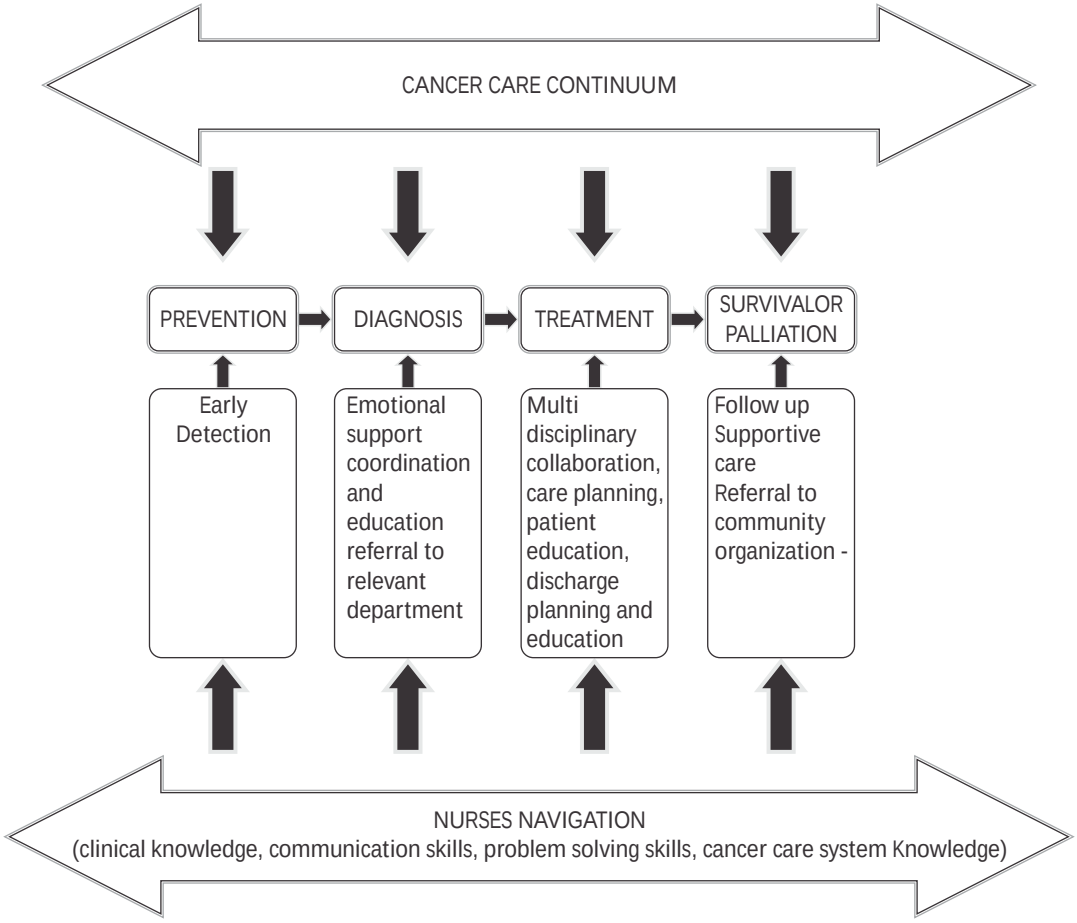

Figure 1. : Schematic Representation of Nursing navigator's role in cancer care

Results

The literature reviewing nurse navigator programmes has proved positive outcomes in various aspects of cancer care like diagnosis, timeliness in completion of treatment, support and continuity of care, patient satisfaction and use of health resources. [16-21] But divergency in studies has been noted in study population, intervention settings, outcome measures and methodologies. Most of the research studies are conducted in breast cancer, lung cancer, head and neck cancers and colorectal cancers.

Discussion

Patient and their families need a constant support nurse, advocate or a navigator to guide them through the increased perplexity of cancer care. Since the introduction of patient navigation into oncologic care, nurse researchers have clearly identified specific care outcomes that result from presence of oncologic nurse navigator. The nurse's role in navigated care for cancer patients has been defined and implemented diversely .[22] Lack of consensus in areas like qualification of navigator, scope of practice, health care setting, disease or area of navigation focus contributes to diverse use of this concept in patient care.[23] Lack of standardization in navigator programmes challenges researchers in this field of study.

Future Directions and Implication for Nursing Practice

Nurse navigator programme is a promising resolution for patient care inadequacies, effective means for reducing barrier in oncology care and increase patient satisfaction and quality of care. This model has been already implemented in most of the developed countries. Interventions need to be developed in developing countries like India to enhance treatment adherence, since non compliance with treatment due to increasing cost is a major problem. Research based evidences are lacking on use of an appropriate conceptual framework for implementation of a nurse navigation programme. Further

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studies are warranted in evaluating patient satisfaction using nurse navigation in various types of cancers as well as in different populations of patients. Specific tools to test and validate patient navigation programmes are lacking, so identification of key components and its relevant evaluation tools to test effectiveness of navigation programme is essential. Replication of studies exploring various patient outcomes and nurse navigation will offer the necessary evidence base to trend in oncologic nursing.

Conclusion :

Navigation is a process by which encompasses assessment of patient needs, development of a plan for education, coordination, communication ,support and implementation of same for effective transition through the illness and evaluation of its effect on patient , family and care givers . Patient navigation using nurses is viewed as an effective strategy to improve standard of oncology care as well as to achieve organizational outcomes.

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