

Workshop: Practical Ways to Help Family Caregivers in Clinical Practice
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Initiate contact with Patient and Caregiver

Do patient assessment as usual

Conduct a brief caregiver assessment (3-5 minutes). Possible questions to ask:

“What is your name and relationship to patient (record information)?”

“Do you live with patient? If not, how far away are you?”

“What questions do you have about the patient’s illness and how it is being treated?”

Give empathy statement, “Family members/friends often feel stress when their loved one is ill.”

How is the illness affecting you and your day-to-day life?

“What kind of information and help do you need?”

Give information statement, Family members often focus on the patient’s health and overlook their own needs. “What are you doing to stay healthy so you can continue to help the patient?”

Promote effective Nurse-Patient-Family Relationship: Using F-O-C-U-S Assessment and Intervention

Family Communication (F)

Assess:

How is the family communicating?

Are they supporting one another?

How is each person responding to the illness?

Key points:

The patient and caregiver (i.e., Pair) is the unit of care-- not just patient

They need to work as a team to manage the illness

Mutual support is important. Caregivers support patients, but patients also need to support caregivers

Caregivers' role is important. They need to be educated about illness and how to help

Depressed or highly anxious caregivers (and patients) need to be referred to social worker, counselor for added help. Rationale: It is difficult to provide high quality care when very depressed.

Promote Optimistic or Hopeful Attitude (O)

Assess:

How is each person feeling about the illness?

What are their thoughts about the future?

Key points:

It is important to maintain hope even though facing a serious illness

Maintain hope by setting realistic, short-term goals and by focusing on present

Share worries and fears so they can be addressed

Hope is contagious. Surround yourself with people who will help you maintain hope. Limit time with pessimistic people

Focus on small joys in your life even though facing a serious illness.

Promote Active Coping

Assess:

How are they coping with the illness?

What do they do to reduce stress? Is it working?

Key points:

Active coping strategies (i.e., problem solving, seeking support) are associated with higher quality of life

Overuse of avoidant coping strategies (i.e., denial, substance abuse) is associated with lower quality of life

Use of acceptance is powerful coping strategy

Patients and family caregivers may use different coping strategies. It helps to recognize and accept that they may cope differently. It is important that they find compatible ways of managing the illness together

Help Them to Manage Uncertainty

Assess:

How much do you understand the illness and treatments?

What additional information would be helpful?

Cancer can create uncertainty in life. How much uncertainty are you feeling about the future?

Key points:

Uncertainty is common during the cancer experience.

Providing patients and caregivers with information helps to reduce their uncertainty

Even if they have information about the illness and treatment, they may still experience uncertainty.

Patients and family members need to find ways to live with uncertainty.

Help Them Manage Symptom Distress

Assess:

To patient and caregiver: What is the main physical or emotional concern you have at this time?

How have you tried to manage it? Has that strategy worked to reduce the symptom?

Key points:

Address the symptoms of both the patient and the family caregiver.

Although it may not be possible to conduct a thorough assessment of caregivers' health, try to assess their major health concern and encourage them to make an appointment to see their physician or practitioner if needed.

Emphasize it is essential that caregivers maintain their health so they can continue to provide high quality care to patients and to maintain their own quality of life