

The importance of nurses' way of caring: the experience of patients' with advanced and terminal cancer

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Background:

The nurse-patient relationship is key to provide individualized care and to improve the quality of life of the Person with Advance and Terminal Cancer (PATC). Moreover, the relationship between the nurse and the person may influence in the global experience of the PATC.

Aim:

To understand the nurse-PATC relationship and to identify its essential elements from patient's perspectives.

Method:

A qualitative study following van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological approach was carried out.

16 PATC hospitalized at the oncology ward of Clínica Universidad de Navarra (Pamplona, Spain) were phenomenologically interviewed in order to get their lived experience. They were asked to describe their relationship with oncology nurses. The interview started with the question 'Can you tell me about how you have experienced your relationship with the nurses of the ward?'

Results:

In the global experience of illness, patients' nurses play a decisive role. Patients when talking about the relationship with nurses refer to their way of caring considering the following aspects:

1. The way in which nurses take care of patients is an expression of their way of being.
2. Patients feel nurses close through their words and actions.
3. The affection and love of nurses is an essential element of the care.
4. Patients are treated as persons despite their health condition and limited lifespan.

As such they are cared in a holistic way considering their corporal and spiritual dimensions. PATC feel that the attitude of nurses and the way in which nurses care for them influences their hospitalization period experience and in some cases even patients' life.

"Nurses treat me with a great affection. (...). Thanks to their affection they understand what I am living and immediately they try to calm and soothe me. That is, they try to make my life more enjoyable, so that my illness is much more bearable"
(Elisabeth, patient 4)

"What I like more is feeling that they love me, they value me as a person and not as one patient more on the ward. I feel that through their way of looking they tell me "you are a person"
(Aránzazu, patient 8)

"The most essential (...) is that nurses know making me feel comfortable when I'm with them. That is, I feel at ease, comfortable, when I'm with them and this is because their way of being, the way in which they talk to me..."
(Ana, patient 12)

"Some nurses here are like if they were mothers...kind, nice, loving... and I thank that a lot! A nurse that is willing to do everything for you, that's something to be welcomed"
(Agustín, patient 6)

Conclusion:

The way of being of nurses and their way of meeting the PATC is central when caring for them. Therefore professionals must be sensitive and conscious of the importance of the way in which they relate with these patients. It is essential to foster among nurses attitudes that lead to care patients as holistic persons with affection and closeness.