E-ISSN: 3116-5974 P-ISSN: 3116-5966
DOI: https://doi.org/10.66206/eduheart.ijnhha.202

The Lived Experiences of Nurses Caring for Patients who Undergo Cancer Treatment

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ABSTRACT

Cancer remains one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide, highlighting the need to better understand the experiences of nurses providing cancer care. This descriptive phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of nine nurses caring for patients undergoing cancer treatment in a selected private hospital in Antipolo, Rizal. Using semi-structured in-depth interviews and Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method, the study identified 164 significant statements that were synthesized into twelve major themes. The findings revealed that oncology nursing extends beyond technical skills, encompassing holistic and patient-centered care grounded in compassion, empathy, clinical competence, emotional resilience, therapeutic communication, interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical advocacy, and respect for patient dignity and autonomy. The study also highlighted the challenges nurses encounter in managing patients who use both conventional and herbal therapies, facilitating communication with patients and families, and achieving personal and professional growth through their caregiving experiences.

Keywords: *Oncology nursing, lived experiences, descriptive phenomenology, cancer care, therapeutic communication, compassionate care, resilience, patient-centered care, qualitative research*

INTRODUCTION

Cancer care requires holistic, patient-centered nursing that addresses patients' physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs. Oncology nurses play a vital role in supporting patients throughout the cancer journey while facing emotional and professional challenges. This study explored the lived experiences of nurses caring for patients undergoing cancer treatment, focusing on caregiving, communication, ethical practice, complementary therapies, and professional growth.

Statement of the Problem

This research study aimed to describe and understand the lived experiences of nurses caring for patients who undergo cancer treatment. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. Narrate your experience in attending to patients undergoing cancer treatment
2. What events in your practice do you find most rewarding?
3. What challenges did you experience in managing these patients?
4. Do you currently manage patients undergoing conventional cancer treatments?
5. What type of treatment does the majority of your patients prefer? Conventional or Traditional?

6. Do you have or are you currently handling a patient on both conventional and traditional cancer treatments?
7. In taking the patient's history, how did you approach the topic of the patient arriving at a decision to go on with conventional cancer treatment?
8. What difficulties in communication do you encounter with patients?
9. How do you balance respect for a patient's belief on traditional medicine while at the same time ensuring safe and effective cancer treatment?
10. What support systems do you have to ensure quality nursing care is provided?
11. How did these experiences influence your professional growth?
12. What is the most significant lesson that you learned from attending to and caring for patients undergoing/underwent cancer treatment?
13. Is there anything else in your day-to-day interaction with such patients that you would like to share?
14. What advice would you like to impart to nurses caring for a special population of patients such as those going through cancer treatment?

Scope and Delimitations

This study explored the lived experiences of nurses caring for patients undergoing cancer treatment in a selected private hospital in Antipolo, Rizal, including their experiences in managing patients who use both conventional cancer treatment and traditional herbal medicines or supplements. Using a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach based on Moustakas (1994), the study involved registered nurses with firsthand experience in oncology care and examined patient care, communication, ethical considerations, workplace support, professional growth, and personal insights. The findings were limited to the participants' lived experiences within the selected hospital and were not intended for statistical generalization.

Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature includes the dimensions of oncology nursing practice, experiences and challenges in cancer care, inclusion of management of patients' use of traditional/herbal medicines or supplements, communication and ethical considerations in treatment decisions and nurses' personal and professional insights from their own experience in caring for patients who undergo cancer treatment. Existing studies such as patient outcomes, symptom management, burnout, resilience, communication and palliative care had been published, there are limited phenomenological research studies that have explored the holistic lived experiences of nurses caring for patients undergoing cancer treatment and by recognizing this gaps in literature, this study also aims to identify challenges and describe experiences of nurses in cancer care; determine how nurses manages situations wherein the patient uses herbal medicine; how nurses communicate with patients and families regarding treatment decision and to identify support systems of nurses, their personal insights and professional lessons and recommendation gained from their own experiences.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theoretical framework by Jean Watson Theory of Human Caring emphasizing that nursing is more than performance of clinical tasks, Joanne Duffy's

Quality Caring Model concept of caring by emphasizing relationships at the core of the nursing process: relationships with patients/families, colleagues, self and community; and Kristen Swanson's Theory of Caring identified the five caring processes that leads to the effective nursing care namely: Knowing, Being With, Doing For, Enabling and Maintaining Belief. The integration of Watson's Theory of Caring integrates a humanistic focus by recognition of patients as human beings; Duffy's Quality Model focuses on outcome-driven relationships, and Swanson's Theory of Caring is a process-oriented approach that leads to safe and effective nursing care.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study aims to understand the lived experiences of nurses caring for patients undergoing cancer treatment in a selected private hospital in Antipolo, Rizal, Philippines.

Research Design

This study employed a **qualitative descriptive phenomenological design** guided by **Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach**. Nine registered nurses with experience in oncology care were selected through non-probability purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed through **Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis** integrated with Moustakas' phenomenological framework. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, peer debriefing, reflexive journaling, and an audit trail. It also involves intentionally selecting participants who possess firsthand knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon being studied to obtain rich and meaningful descriptions of nurses' lived experiences.

Research Steps

After obtaining approval from the appropriate academic authorities and permission from the selected private hospital in Antipolo, Rizal, the researcher coordinated with hospital officials to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria. Eligible nurses received a Participant information sheet and signed an Informed Consent Form before participation. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews conducted in a private and convenient setting, with participants' consent for audio recording and field note documentation. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 50 minutes, with follow-up interviews conducted when necessary for clarification. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved. All interviews were then transcribed verbatim and verified against audio recordings to ensure accuracy prior to data analysis.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

The data collection process commenced using semi-structured in-depth interviews and was analyzed through **Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis** integrated with Moustakas' phenomenological framework. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, peer debriefing, reflexive journaling, and an audit trail.

Data Analysis Methods

The analysis generated **164 significant statements**, **72 focused codes**, **18 meaning units**, and **12 major themes** across four research questions. The findings revealed that oncology nursing is characterized by (1) compassionate and patient-centered care; (2) clinical and emotional resilience; (3) evidence-based management of complementary and alternative therapies; (4) therapeutic communication and ethical patient advocacy; (5) family-centered and collaborative care; and (6) personal and professional transformation through compassion, resilience, lifelong learning, and reflective practice. Participants described oncology nursing as a holistic and meaningful profession that requires balancing clinical competence with emotional support, ethical responsibility, and cultural sensitivity.

Research Hypotheses and Validation

This study assumed that patients diagnosed with cancer choose to receive conventional treatments over traditional methods like herbal medicines or herbal supplements. The pilot interviews successfully elicited rich and meaningful narratives, and minor revisions involving the sequencing of interview prompts and the addition of probing questions were made. Since these revisions did not substantially alter the interview guide and the pilot participants met all the inclusion criteria, the pilot interviews were retained and merged with the actual interview data to form a single integrated dataset for analysis.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical protocols by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and allowing participants to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, ethical issues encompassed the imperative to ensure the respectful portrayal of participants' views in the final analysis and reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher extracted 164 significant statements, which were synthesized into focused codes and meaning units. Twelve major themes that emerged from participants' narratives. The **first** theme: Compassionate and Patient Centered Care; Navigating the Clinical and Emotional Demands of Oncology Nursing; Professional Growth, Resilience and Meaning in Oncology Nursing; Balancing Conventional and Traditional Treatment Decisions; Promoting Patient Safety through Education and Advocacy; Respecting Cultural Beliefs Through Collaborative Decision-Making; Therapeutic Communication as the Foundation of Oncology Nursing Care,; Ethical Patient Advocacy Through Respect for Autonomy and Informed Decision-Making; Family-Centered and Collaborative Communication in Cancer Care; Personal and Professional Transformation Through Oncology Nursing; Learning through patients' Courage, Hope and Resilience; Sustaining Compassion, Professional Growth, and Meaning in Oncology Nursing.

SUMMARY

The qualitative research conducted by the researcher revealed that the key findings of this research are six connected dimensions, namely: Therapeutic Communication, Ethical Advocacy and Family Collaboration, Personal and Professional Growth, Safe Management of

Complementary Therapies, Clinical and Emotional Resilience, and most importantly, Compassionate Patient-centered Care. The analysis of the merged pilot and actual interview data revealed that patients mostly preferred to receive conventional cancer treatments over the traditional / herbal medicines or supplements.

CONCLUSIONS

Oncology nursing is a holistic, patient-centered care grounded in compassion. It also requires nurses to integrate advanced clinical competence with emotional resilience, ethical responsibility, and therapeutic communication. Cultural beliefs and treatment preferences are respected, enhancing trust and strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration among patients, their families, and healthcare professionals through shared decision-making and ethical advocacy to preserve patient dignity and autonomy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are suggested: Strengthening Compassionate and holistic oncology nursing practice, strengthening evidence-based management of complementary and alternative medicine, enhancing therapeutic communication and ethical oncology, and promoting professional growth, resilience, and well-being of oncology nurses.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my research adviser and to all individuals who provided assistance in completing this research. I would also like to express my gratitude to my fiancé, family, friends and colleagues for their unwavering encouragement and support during sleepless nights over the entire process. Ultimately, to our Almighty God, who showered me with strength and wisdom for the completion of this research.

AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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