
Nurse Navigation Program

Outcomes from a breast cancer center in Brazil

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BACKGROUND: Nurse navigators play a major role in the care provided to patients with cancer within the healthcare system.

OBJECTIVES: This study aims describe the outcomes of a pioneering nurse navigation program established in a breast cancer center in a private, nonprofit hospital in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

METHODS: This is a cross-sectional, retrospective, descriptive study based on electronic health records. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis.

FINDINGS: Data from 263 patients participating in the navigation program and hospital quality indicators showed a reduction in the time elapsed from diagnosis to the start of treatment from 24 days in 2014 to 18 days in 2017. Of 153 patients who responded to a patient satisfaction survey, 97% were satisfied or very satisfied with the care provided by the nurse navigator.

KEYWORDS

nurse navigator; integrated care; continuity; oncology; care coordination; transition

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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BREAST CANCER IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF CANCER DEATH among women in developing countries and the second cause of cancer death among women in developed countries. Breast cancer is also the most frequent type of cancer affecting women around the world, with 2.1 million new cases estimated by the Globocan project in 2018 (Global Cancer Organization, 2018).

Patients with a cancer diagnosis face life-changing decisions. In addition, they frequently have to deal with healthcare systems that provide fragmented care, causing delays in the start of treatment following diagnosis. For these patients, the fragmentation of care translates into challenges that add to the anxiety, fear, despair, and confusion that are often present in the course of the disease (Wagner et al., 2014).

The literature describes three broad challenges faced by patients with cancer, family members, and caregivers: delays and lack of coordination of care, lack of relevant information, and poor emotional and social support (Wagner et al., 2010; Yatim et al., 2017). To overcome these issues, institutions have invested in care transition programs for patients with cancer and other chronic diseases (Dajczman et al., 2013). Many healthcare organizations, particularly in developed countries, have implemented patient support programs involving nurses who help patients navigate the healthcare system (Shockney, Haylock, & Cantril, 2013; Trevillion, Singh-Carlson, Wong, & Sherriff, 2015; Walkinshaw, 2011).

According to the Oncology Nursing Society (2017), an oncology nurse navigator (ONN) is “a professional RN with oncology-specific clinical knowledge who offers individualized assistance to patients, families, and caregivers to help overcome healthcare system barriers. . . . Using the nursing process, an ONN provides education and resources to facilitate informed decision making and timely access to quality health and psychosocial care throughout all phases of the cancer continuum” (p. 4). As such, the ONN is in charge of transitioning patients throughout the care continuum and facilitates the integration of patients into the healthcare system (Cantril & Haylock, 2013; Lubejko et al., 2017; Oncology Nursing Society, 2017). Navigation in oncology has demonstrated benefits for patients diagnosed with cancer, such as shorter time to diagnosis and treatment, increased patient and caregiver knowledge, better adherence to care, and better quality of life. The ONN role