Moral Distress in Nurses Providing Direct Care on Inpatient Oncology Units

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Moral distress is defined as knowing the right thing to do when policy constraints do not allow for appropriate choices. The purpose of the current study was to explore the existence of moral distress in oncology nurses with a cross-sectional survey completed by nurses working on inpatient units at a midwestern cancer hospital. Investigators distributed the Moral Distress Scale—Revised to all direct care staff nurses. The main research variables were moral distress, level of education, age, and type of unit. Most of the 73 nurses had low to moderate scores, and two had high scores. No significant correlations were observed among age or years of experience. Type of unit and level of moral distress were correlated, and an inverse relationship between level of education and moral distress was found. Moral distress exists in nurses who work on oncology units irrespective of experience in oncology or the specific unit. Nurses must be aware of the existence of moral distress and find ways to reduce potential emotional problems.

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