The Process of Oncology Nurse Practitioner Patient Navigation: A Pilot Study

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Oncology nurse practitioner (ONP) patient navigators may improve clinical outcomes. However, no standard measures of the process of oncology patient navigation or of related clinical outcomes exist, and research in this area is limited. The exploratory pilot study detailed in this article used grounded theory and interviews with three ONPs to define the processes employed by ONP patient navigators in caring for patients with cancer.

At a Glance

• In general, oncology nurse practitioner (ONP) navigation has been shown to achieve high-quality, cost-effective care.
• ONPs use unique navigation processes, including fielding telephone calls, providing support, coordinating care, and tracking.
• Additional research involving larger samples is needed to validate the processes used by ONPs when navigating care for patients with cancer.

Methods

Constructivism is the philosophical orientation that was adopted for this study. Data and analyses are created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data (Charmaz, 2012). This viewpoint facilitates one in learning “how, when, and to what extent the experience is embedded in larger and often hidden positions, networks, relationships, and situations” (Charmaz, 2012, p. 130).

Three ONPs (one certified breast cancer navigator and two advanced oncology certified nurse practitioners) working in inpatient and outpatient settings were recruited for this study, which was guided by the following research question: What processes do ONPs use when caring for patients with cancer? Eligibility criteria were (a) state licensure to practice as an NP, (b) certification to practice as an oncology nurse, (c) a minimum of five full-time years of experience practicing in oncology nursing, and (d) the ability to speak English. The mean age of the ONP patient navigators in the sample was 45 years, and the average number of years working in nursing was 19, with an average of 12 years working in oncology nursing and an average of 3 years working as a navigator. Demographic data are depicted in Table 1. Interviews with