Supportive Patient Care in the Guise of a Quilt

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Attention to the physical environment of an oncology center and the therapeutic potential of the environment are concepts to consider in nursing care. Art can enhance the human elements of caring and touch. Colorful quilts, whether hanging on the walls or given to patients, can provide emotional and physical warmth as well as represent a caring environment.

Case Study

D.M., a 43-year-old woman, recently had an annual screening mammogram. A suspicious mass was noted, and she underwent a biopsy. D.M. was diagnosed with invasive cancer. She now presents to clinic for a consultation with the breast surgeon. After, D.M. waits in the conference room to speak with the nurse practitioner about her options for surgical treatment. A single parent of three school-age children, D.M. works full-time and is uncertain how she can possibly consider the variety of emotional concerns associated with her cancer diagnosis coupled with the existence of her other challenging life circumstances is overwhelming. In a calm, unhurried manner, the nurse practitioner reassures D.M. that her feelings of dread are typical, yet can accentuate her fear and anxiety and create a sense of impending doom. The visceral reactions she reports, such as nausea and diarrhea, also are common. D.M. stops crying and is ready to talk about her treatment options. She is thankful for the calming skill of her oncology nurses and the personalized quilt that communicates a sense of supportive caring and warmth from her healthcare team. The nurse practitioner smiles inwardly because she just talked with a survivor who is involved in the quilt project and marvels at how that once anxious patient is now helping others during their peak time of emotional need.

Nursing Assessment

The nurse is not certain the busy oncology clinic will allow time to provide the necessary support D.M. needs today and shares that concern with the nurse practitioner, who comes to the conference room and completes a patient consultation for the social worker. The nurse practitioner assesses the variety of emotional concerns D.M. verbalizes: fear of death, future care of loved ones, and anxiety related to treatment decision making, bodily changes, and anticipated symptoms. D.M. expresses that the reality of the life-long vigilance associated with her cancer diagnosis coupled with the existence of her other challenging life circumstances is overwhelming. The nurse practitioner reassures D.M. that her feelings of dread are typical, yet can accentuate her fear and anxiety and create a sense of impending doom. The visceral reactions she reports, such as nausea and diarrhea, also are common. D.M. stops crying and is ready to talk about her treatment options. She is thankful for the calming skill of her oncology nurses and the personalized quilt that communicates a sense of supportive caring and warmth from her healthcare team. The nurse practitioner smiles inwardly because she just talked with a survivor who is involved in the quilt project and marvels at how that once anxious patient is now helping others during their peak time of emotional need.

Etiology of the Problem

People have different emotional responses upon hearing they have cancer. Those responses are unique to their circumstances and usual coping skills.

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