

# Experiences of existential and spiritual nursing care for cancer patients

## **Aim:**

To understand how nurses in a continuous education in cancer care perceive spiritual and existential care.

## **Background:**

Spiritual and existential care are important parts of holistic cancer nursing. This study focuses upon how nurses perceive spiritual and existential care and how they reflect on their role as cancer nurses providing such care.

## **Method:**

Dialogical Narrative Analysis described by Arthur Frank was used.

To do a narrative analysis he advises to: 1) Really listen to the stories. 2) Tell each story as fully as possible. 3) Focus on a few stories and stick with them, organizing the content. 4) If possible, set the stories in dialogue with each other. 5) Why did the storyteller need challenges to select this story, why does it count so much to him or her, and why did he or she tell it just as he or she did (Frank, A. W. 2012).

## **Data collection:**

30 out of 39 students gave written consent to use their reflection notes concerning spiritual and existential care to cancer patients. Two focus group interviews were conducted. 5 students participated in each interview.

## **Findings:**

The participants associate religious issues with spiritual and existential care. They are afraid of not being able to answer religious questions, as they may not have clear answers to this, and their own religious beliefs may be contested.

Especially nurses without religious faith, might find these questions challenging.

If the nurses manage to meet their patients with openness, they may become vulnerable to their own existence and spirituality. However, when being able to both listen to the patient and sharing their own thoughts, they can experience human-to-human meetings in the nurse-patient relationship.

## **Conclusion:**

The nurses express that the continuous education contributed through knowledge, simulation and reflection, towards becoming more secure in meeting patients' questions. It is a learning process where the nurses discover that by shifting focus from themselves to the other, they do not need clear answers to questions asked.

## **Reference:**

Frank, A. W. (2012). Practicing dialogical narrative analysis. Varieties of narrative analysis, 33-52.