Nurses' Role in Ambulatory Day Care

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Introduction

Ambulatory care nursing is a rapidly expanding, multidimensional specialty within the nursing profession. The nurses’ role is a necessary component in a complex and multifaceted care delivery system. The current model of care emphasises on health promotion and disease prevention and nursing care, together with extensive patient and family involvement. As a result, patients can be discharged earlier which lead to a decline in usage of in-patient resources but greater need for out-patient care services.

Ambulatory Palliative Care

The health care delivery system is continuing its shift from, the formal to informal, the traditional inpatient medical model to the outpatient health promotion model. It is evidenced by an increase in the average number of patients on hospice home care service/day in Hong Kong from around 9,300 in year 2001 to almost 12,800 in year 2004.1 Ambulatory service is an important aspect of the continuum of palliative care. Symptom management and comfort care can be continued after hospital discharge and changing needs of the patients in the community can be met by a supportive ambulatory service. A less threatening and familiar atmosphere for patient at home can mean reducing unnecessary and often unwanted hospital admissions. It is important that care at home should be in liaison with the patient’s wish to receive palliative care in the place of their choice.

Palliative Day Care

Palliative day care service involves a spectrum of medical and social care designed for patients in the community.2 In Hong Kong, eight out of ten palliative care centres are providing day care service.3 The home-like rather than institutional environment is symbolic of the care provided.4 The provision of palliative day care service enables clients to receive care and rehabilitation in a relaxed and informal atmosphere during the day. Clients can discuss their concerns regarding their symptoms or pain control, emotion and spiritual issues. Day care also provides social and creative opportunities for patients and their families, so as to maximize patients’ quality of life during their illness.

Physical Care

Patient’s physical well being can be reflected by vital signs, symptoms and pain assessment during day care. Special nursing procedures are helpful in management of difficult problems, such as fugating wound management and lymphoedema care.6 Medical back up in day care service is preferred, though this may be limited by availability of resources. Exercise and activities with rehabilitative component serve to improve patients' body image, hygiene and confidence. Complementary therapy, such as massage with aromatherapy, can promote comfort, ease tense, relax and restore a sense of balance of the whole person.7

Psychological Care

Nurses come from a tradition of listening and understanding their patient’s deepest needs.8 Nurses’ attitude in patient care is crucial in provision of psychological and emotional support. Caring patients with a a sensitive and empathetic manner is essential for building up rapport. Sharing sorrows, concerns, and even joys and triumphs provide a great deal of comfort to patients.9 In these in-depth encounters, nurses should also be sensitive to patients’ willingness to share, their individual choices and wishes as affected by various factors, including the cultural background.

Social Care

Day care centre provides a warm, safe and homely environment, with special facilities and equipments for the disabled. Provision of transport in this context is important to facilitate their attendance. Creative activities and diversional