

Transformation in Palliative Care Delivery in Surgery

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Abstract : Introduction: Palliative care is no doubt necessary in surgery. When one looks at studies of what patients with life-threatening illness want and compares to what they experience in surgical units, the gap is huge. Surgical nurses, being patient advocates, should engage with patients and families sooner rather than later in their illness trajectories to consider how to manage the illness, not just their capacity to survive. Objective: This clinical practice guide aims to fill the service gap of palliative care in surgery by producing a quality-driven, evidence-based yet straightforward clinical practice guide based on a focus strategy. Methodology: In line with Guide to Good Nursing Practice: End-of-Life Care recommended by Nursing Council of Hong Kong and the strategic goal of improving quality of palliative care proposed in HA Strategic Plan 2017-2022, multiple phases of work were undertaken from July 2015 to December 2017. A pragmatic clinical practice guide for surgical patients facing life-threatening conditions was developed based on assessments on knowledge of and attitudes towards end-of-life care of surgical nurses. Key domains, including preparation for bereavement, nursing care for imminently dying patients and at the dying scene were crystallized according to the results of the assessments and the palliative care checklist formulated by UCH Palliative Care Team. After a year of rollout, its content was refined through analyses of implementation in routine practice and consensus opinions from frontline nurses. Results and Outcomes: This clinical practice guide inspires surgical nurses with the art of care to provide for patients' comfort, function, and longevity. It provides practical directions and assists nurses to master the skills on advance care planning and learn how to be clear with patients, families and themselves about the realities of the disease pictures. Through the implementation, patients and families are included in the decision process, and their wishes are honored. The delivery of explicit and high-quality palliative care maintains good nurse-to-patient relations and enhances satisfaction of hospital care of patients and families. Conclusion: Surgical nursing has always been up to the unique challenges of the era. This clinical practice guide has become an island of credibility for our nurses as they traverse the often stormy waters of life-limiting illness.

Keywords : palliative care delivery, palliative care in surgery, hospice care, end-of-life care

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