

# Discussing Death, Dying, and End-of-Life Goals of Care: A Communication Skills Training Module for Oncology Nurses

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**Background:** Effective communication, particularly at the end of life, is an essential skill for oncology nurses, but few receive formal training in this area.

**Objectives:** The aim of this article is to adapt an end-of-life care communication skills training (CST) module, originally developed for oncologists, for oncology nurses and to evaluate participants' confidence in using the communication skills learned and their satisfaction with the module.

**Methods:** The adapted end-of-life care module consisted of a 45-minute didactic, exemplary video and 90 minutes of small group interaction and experiential role play with a simulated patient. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, 247 inpatient oncology nurses completed pre-/post-workshop surveys rating their confidence in discussing death, dying, and end-of-life goals of care with patients, as well as overall satisfaction with the module.

**Findings:** Nurses' confidence in discussing death, dying, and end-of-life goals of care increased significantly after attending the workshop. Nurse participants indicated satisfaction with the module by agreeing or strongly agreeing to all six items assessing satisfaction 90%–98% of the time. Nurses' CST in discussing death, dying, and end-of-life care showed feasibility, acceptability, and potential benefit at improving confidence in having end-of-life care discussions.

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Key words: death; dying; end-of-life care; nurse–patient communication; transitions in goals of care; communication skills; training

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/15.CJON.697-702

Despite nurses' centrality in the process of the healthcare team communicating with patients, few receive formal education specific to communication, particularly related to end-of-life care (Chant, Jenkinson, Randle, & Russell, 2002; Kruijver, Kerstra, Bensing, & van de Wiel, 2000; Vydellingum, 2006). However, nurses rank communication as one of the most important competencies to their practice (McCabe, 2004; McGilton, Irwin-Robinson, Boscart, & Spanjevic, 2006). Although nurses

generally feel confident in providing care for the physical needs of patients with cancer, they find addressing the patients' emotional concerns to be more difficult (Rask, Jensen, Andersen, & Zachariae, 2009). These reported difficulties in communication exist among hospice nurses as well (Ellington et al., 2008; Ellington, Reblin, Clayton, Berry, & Mooney, 2012).

Nurses' communication skills are crucial to patient care because they provide much of the care and support to patients and their families throughout the disease trajectory. Nurses