Impact of a palliative care link-nurse programme at Mulago Hospital, Kampala

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Introduction

- A needs assessment carried out in 2010 at Mulago Hospital, Kampala, showed that 45% of all medical and surgical inpatients have unmet palliative care needs.
- Therefore the palliative care unit developed a programme to train nurses in different wards/areas of Mulago hospital in palliative care to improve services within the hospital.
Aims of the Link Nurse Programme

- To improve palliative care provision within Mulago hospital
- Improve links between the palliative care unit and the wards
- Equip nurses with knowledge and skills to provide palliative care to patients admitted on the wards
Description of the Programme (1)

• With the help of Ward in Charges, one nurse was selected from wards where a high proportion of patients in need of Palliative care are admitted
• They were trained for five days using the palliative care tool kit (3 days followed by 2 days)
• Both lectures and group discussions were used
• Ongoing mentorship and supervision
Description of the Programme (2)

- Use of clinical protocols
- Use of categorisation system for patients
  - Level 1 – Generalist needs met by ward
  - Level 2 – Generalist needs met by link nurses
  - Levels 3 & 4 – Specialist needs by MPCU

- To date 27 link nurses have been trained from 11 different clinical areas
Evaluation

- Pre and post course assessment and confidence ratings
- Course evaluation forms
- Audit re the availability of clinical protocols
- Review of link-nurse activity sheets and action plans
- Review of MPCU documentation
- Most Significant Change (MSC) stories
- Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs)
Results

% Patients referred by Link Nurse
Jan 12 to Jun 13

% Patients

Jan-12  Feb-12  Mar-12  Apr-12  May-12  Jun-12  Jul-12  Aug-12  Sep-12  Oct-12  Nov-12  Dec-12  Jan-13  Feb-13  Mar-13  Apr-13  May-13  Jun-13

Series1
Results

Reasons given for referral by Link Nurse 2012

- Access to Medication
- Request Ward Team
- Inadequate Symptom Control
- Complex Psychosocial
- Discharge Support
- Financial Support
- Others
Developing Themes

• Change in attitude e.g.
  • Towards PC
  • Patient care
  • Use of PC drugs
• Developing new skills & knowledge e.g.
  • Assessing patients need
  • Pain assessment & management
  • Knowledge from training
• Relationships e.g.
  • Nurse-patient
  • With the MPCU
• Challenges e.g.
  • Heavy workload
  • Training
• Outcomes e.g.
  • Providing better care
  • Confidence
  • Knowledge transfer
MSC Stories

• “Patients are happy and appreciate our efforts they feel that they are loved and cared for by the palliative care team and really feel the worthiness of living through our management.”

• “Excellence is not a skill it is an attitude. I had a negative attitude towards palliative care thinking it was care for the dying patients only. But after training I developed a positive attitude because palliative care improves the quality of life of patients and their families.”
Challenges

- Heavy work load
- Mentoring becomes difficult as they work in shifts
- Change over
- Getting doctors to prescribe
- Being moved to other wards
Conclusion

• Improving accessibility to palliative care in a national referral hospital through link-nurses has been successful.
• Knowledge about palliative care and the services available within the hospital has increased and more patients have access to palliative care.
• Motivation is high within the link nurse team with a sense of empowerment.
• We suggest that this is a model that could be utilised elsewhere.
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