

Clinical project: Discussing bad news with cancer patients. A communication tool for health care professionals in home care.

Kleo Dubois¹, Sara Dehandschutter², Hans Neefs³

¹ Cédric Hèle Institute, Bruul 52/4, 2800 Mechelen, Belgium

² Groepspraktijk COPP, 3000 Leuven, Belgium

³Stand Up to Cancer (Kom op tegen kanker), Koningsstraat 217, 1210 Brussel, Belgium



Background

Health care professionals (HCPs) in home care are increasingly facing clients with cancer. These clients often get bad news at different moments in their trajectory (diagnosis, start of treatment, side-effects, long-term effects after treatment, recurrence, palliative diagnosis,...). How should HCPs in home care communicate with clients about the 'bad news' they received? How to deal with the emotions and reactions of the clients? How to address the needs and emotions of the relatives? And how should HCPs deal with their own emotions in these situations?

This project is a collaboration between the *Cédric Hèle Institute* and *Stand Up to Cancer, the Cancer League in Flanders (Belgium)*.

Methodology

After a literature review and exploratory discussions with stakeholders in the sector of home care, the Cédric Hèle Institute organized 10 individual and 4 focus group interviews with HCPs in non-residential care such as home nurses, social workers, general practitioners, and others to explore their experiences with communicating with cancer patients at home.



The brochure 'Communicating bad news in oncology' published by Stand up to Cancer in 2014 formulated a set of recommendations for HCPs in hospital care. These were discussed and reviewed in the individual and focus group interviews by HCPs, based on their experience with cancer patients at home. The specific communication needs of HCPs were listed and grouped.



Results

The individual and focus group interviews led to new insights and additions to the existing recommendations for residential care. The home context poses specific challenges for communicating with cancer patients. In collaboration with a psychologist experienced in the setting of home care, communication advice was written down and grouped into the following categories: my client, the relatives, myself as a home HCP, communication tips and practical information.

The recommendations were published in the form of a fan booklet, a compact and easy-to-use communication tool for HCPs. The Cédric Hèle Institute also created a training module of each category for HCPs working with cancer patients. The combination of a communication training module and a tool offers an integrated answer to the communication needs of HCPs in home care.

Impact on practice

With the practical fan booklet home nurses, social workers, general practitioners and other providers of home care have a strong, practical communication tool to address bad news issues with their clients with cancer. The tool also pays attention to the emotional self-management of the HCPs and offers useful examples of modal sentences. In addition to this, training modules are provided in which the different items are further explored and communication skills practiced.