A Work Sampling Assessment of the Nursing Delivery of Palliative Care in Ambulatory Cancer Centers

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Background: Most cancer care occurs within infusion rooms at ambulatory cancer centers, which are staffed by RNs administering chemotherapies and other cancer care medications. Many patients receiving these therapies have basic palliative care needs that could be addressed by the RNs. However, the extent to which these RNs spend their time on basic, or “primary,” palliative care is unknown.

Objectives: The aim of this project was to conduct a work sampling assessment of infusion room RNs’ work activities and provision of primary palliative care.

Methods: A single observer conducted direct observation work sampling at three academic cancer center infusion rooms. Nursing tasks were recorded via freehand text and later assigned an appropriate task code.

Findings: Observed infusion room RNs spent about 1% of their time on direct care palliative care tasks, primarily symptom assessment. The remainder of their time was divided among direct (28%) and indirect (56%) nonpalliative care activities, unit-related activities (7%), and personal time (9%). Infusion room RNs spent less than a third of their time on administering direct patient care and very minimal time on performing palliative care activities.