Nurses’ Attitudes Toward Clinical Trials at a Comprehensive Cancer Center

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Key Points . . .

➤ Nurses at a comprehensive cancer center had high expectations that exceeded historical success rates for benefit from experimental therapy.
➤ As a group, research nurses are most likely to have favorable views toward clinical trials and about patient understanding regarding treatment plans and goals.
➤ Nurses working in intensive care units or bone marrow transplant units are more likely to express concerns about patient understanding and physician-patient communication.

Clinical trials are an important part of contemporary oncology practice, allowing for development of new treatment strategies and increased knowledge of malignant disease. The conduct of clinical trials involving human subjects raises significant ethical concerns (Emanuel, Wendler, & Grady, 2000; Grady, 1991; Schutte & Burnett, 2000). These concerns include issues about patients’ understanding of their involvement in clinical trials, expectations from the research, and the quality of the informed consent process (Ganz, 1990; Penman at al., 1984). Patients often do not understand the purpose of clinical trials and may have unrealistic expectations regarding their benefits (Cassileth, Lusk, Miller, & Hurwitz, 1982; Daugherty et al., 1995). These factors are of particular importance in the field of oncology because patients with cancer often are more vulnerable as a result of the seriousness of their illness and are willing to seek therapy they perceive may offer benefit regardless of potential toxicities (Cheng et al., 2000; Slevin et al., 1995).

The study of decision making in clinical trials has concentrated on patient, community, and physician understanding and attitudes (Bujorian, 1988; Cheng et al., 2000; Cox & Avis, 1996; Ganz, 1990; Neufeld, Degner, & Dick, 1993; Tabak, 1995; Yoder, O’Rourke, Etnyre, Spears, & Brown, 1997). However, patients have an additional element in their decision-making process, namely the impact of nurses. Nurses are involved in clinical trials both as clinical investigators and as caregivers for patients undergoing experimental treatments (Arrigo, 1991; Cassidy, 1993; McEvoy, Cannon, & MacDermott, 1991; Walczak, McGuire, Haisfeld, & Beezley, 1994). In the clinical and research settings, nurses facilitate...