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The development of a nursing pathway to enhance the care of ostomates in the United Kingdom National Health Service

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Aim

To enhance nursing care through the development of a nursing pathway for ostomy patients

Background

Changes in UK policy have resulted in fewer numbers of specialist colo-rectal nurses, and increasing numbers of general nurses with limited expertise in colo-rectal cancer and stoma care. It was therefore seen as essential to explore how these changes impact on the patients' journey through care, and their emerging quality of life.

Method

Qualitative research was used to gather the rich, in-depth data necessary to gain insight into, patients' perceptions of their care. A grounded theory approach, was used for 4 patient focus groups as this supported discussion and enabled key points raised in one focus group to be added into those that followed

Results

Differences were reported in expertise received with some seeing a specialist nurse on limited occasions. Patients described the importance of expert support at the time of surgery to reduce anxieties, help them accept their diagnosis and transition to life following treatment. They stressed the need for ongoing expert professional support in the period following discharge. The focus groups also revealed the challenges faced as they learned to live with permanently altered body functions, the time it took to learn to anticipate and plan for practical issues and the fear of recurrence of cancer.

Conclusions

The wants and needs of these patients were clearly articulated and highlighted key areas where improvements need to be considered. Those who had had good specialist support reported less problems, and better coping strategies. Thus, it is essential that a nursing pathway be developed integrating the differing levels of nursing knowledge and expertise to deliver seamless high quality expert care from the onset of treatment. Only then will patients receive care that enables them to achieve the best quality of life possible.

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