

GPs' participation in multidisciplinary team meetings in oncology

Interview study in Belgium

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Introduction

General practitioners (GPs) are important members of the multidisciplinary team (MDT) involved in cancer patients' care. In Belgium, MDT meetings in oncology are reimbursed since 2003 by the National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (NIHDI). Although important, the presence of the GP is not mandatory, nor is a task description provided. Even reimbursed, the attendance of GPs at MDT meetings in oncology is minimal. Little is known what the perceived barriers for participation are and how GPs perceive their role toward participation.

Objectives

The study objective is to describe:

1. GPs' perceived roles and their current experiences toward the MDT meetings for oncology patients
2. GPs' barriers for participation.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews until data saturation, with Belgian GPs all having MDT meeting experience. Thematic analysis principles are used to analyze data.

Results

Sixteen GPs have been interviewed. Their perceived role is being the representative of the patient, as they share a history of longitudinal care. The results show that the participation and contribution of the GP is appreciated and respected by the other participants of the meeting. GPs' perceived input at the MDT meetings is especially important during patients' later disease stages, or when discussing complex home care situations. The perceived added value of discussing and reaching consensus during MDT meetings promotes GPs' participation. Through participating MDT meetings, a better interpersonal relationship with some specialists was mentioned. Barriers for participation are mostly practical (timing and quality of the invitation, hospital proximity). These may be overcome through video-conferencing.

Discussion

GPs confirm the necessity of effective collaboration and communication with specialists in the complex situation of cancer patients' care. A MDT meeting is an operationalization of inter-professional care and fosters interpersonal contacts with specialists, eventually leading to better patient care.