

RESPONDING TO NURSES' COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES: EVALUATING A BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM FOR COMMUNICATION KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR NURSES

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INTRODUCTION

Nurses are often in a position that requires them to engage in difficult conversations with patients who have life-limiting illness (LLI). Whilst some are confident with core communication skills (listening, rapport building, empathy), they are less familiar with the full repertoire of communication micro-skills and conversation structure.

AIM

To conduct a preliminary evaluation of the Communication Skills Training Program for Nurses (CSTN) (Figure 1), which aimed to enhance nurses' communication skills with patients who have LLI.

METHOD

Design: Feasibility, single arm, intervention study of CSTN (Web-Based Education Program, followed by Role Play Workshop).

Setting: 3 wards at Barwon Health.

Primary outcomes: Communication skills knowledge, Feasibility – Retention & Completion.

Secondary outcomes: Improvement in self-efficacy (SE) of communication skills, Workshop Satisfaction.

Measures: Pre/Post MCQ (Knowledge), SE - Communication Skills (SE-12).

Analysis: Descriptive statistics, Paired T-Test.

Table 1: Participant characteristics

Characteristic	Category	N	Percent
Age*	22 to 39	5	21.7
	> 40 to 54	8	34.8
	>54	7	30.4
Sex	Female	22	95.7%
	Male	1	4.3%
Clinical Area*	Medical	6	26.1%
	Surgical	1	4.3%
	Palliative Care	13	56.5%
Formal teaching in comms skills	Yes	6	26.1%
iValidate Training	Yes	7	30.4%

* Data missing for 3 participants

Table 2: Knowledge of communication skills

M	Pre (Mean, SD)	Post (Mean, SD)	Sig.
Module 1	59.1 (17.3)	81.9 (16.9)	0.000
Module 2	65.5 (9.9)	78.3 (14.9)	0.002
Module 3	76.1 (11.4)	87.2 (14.1)	0.015

Table 3: Self-efficacy in communication skills

Criteria	Pre	Post	Sig.
Identify the issues the patient wishes to address	6.8 (1.7)	8.2 (1.3)	0.003
Make an agenda/plan	5.6 (1.8)	8.1 (1.3)	0.000
Urge the patient to expand	7.0 (2.0)	8.6 (1.3)	0.003
Listen attentively to the patient	7.6 (2.0)	8.6 (1.4)	0.029
Encourage the patient to express thoughts	7.2 (2.3)	8.8 (1.2)	0.003
Structure the conversation	6.0 (2.1)	8.0 (1.5)	0.000
Demonstrate appropriate non-verbal behaviour	7.2 (1.9)	8.8 (1.0)	0.002
Show empathy	7.7 (1.9)	9.1 (0.9)	0.005
To clarify what the patient knows	6.8 (1.8)	8.6 (1.2)	0.000
Check the patient's understanding	7.1 (1.8)	8.4 (1.3)	0.003
To make a plan based on shared decisions	6.6 (2.2)	8.3 (1.4)	0.001
Close the conversation	6.6 (1.9)	8.5 (1.3)	0.000

Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (SE-12), Axbøe et al., 2016

FIGURE 1: CSTN INTERVENTION

Web-Based Education Program

Module 1: Gathering Information

Module 2: Articulating Empathy

Module 3: Responding to Difficult Questions



Role Play Workshop

4-Hour Experiential Workshop

RESULTS

23 Nurses were recruited:

- 21 completed the online program
- 20 participated in the 4-hour workshop
- 18 completed the online program & workshop.

Statistically significant increases:

- knowledge of communication skills (Table 2)
 - SE in communication skills (Table 3).
- High levels of satisfaction (> 6/7) with the workshop (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The CSTN is an accessible and effective training option for nurses, increasing self-efficacy and knowledge for communicating with patients who have LLI. This may be an efficient strategy for communication skills training for nurses, the largest cohort of the healthcare workforce. Blended learning:

- offers flexibility for nurses to engage in professional development in a way that suits their work/life commitments;
- allows for self-reflection, and increased knowledge, prior to experiential learning;
- provides opportunity to consolidate knowledge after face-to-face workshops.

Table 4: Satisfaction with the workshop

Criteria	Mean	SD
Overall, I am satisfied with the training	6.6	.587
The training was a good use of my time	6.6	.598
The training provided me with useful skills	6.7	.470
I intend to use what I have learnt in clinical practice	6.7	.571
I would recommend this training to others	6.6	.598
This communication workshop should be compulsory for all nurses (registered and enrolled)	6.5	.688
The small group facilitator was knowledgeable and able to answer my questions	6.7	.550
The web-based learning program (ELOOMI) provided a strong foundation in preparation for this workshop	6.5	.943
I now feel more confident about gathering information from a patient	6.5	.688
Now I have greater understanding about how to show empathy	6.4	.587
I now feel more confident about responding to difficult questions	6.4	.587

Adapted from Clayton et al., 2012. 7-point Likert Type scale: '1' Strongly disagree' to '7' Strongly agree.

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