

Cancer rehabilitation – Exploring the views of nursing staff on referring patients for exercise

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A growing body of evidence indicates the benefits of exercise for cancer patients but little is known about the beliefs and perceptions of nursing staff from oncology which influence their decisions to refer patients with advanced disease for exercise. Loss of ability to manage daily activities and deterioration in physical function can be a significant problem and can be a source of distress for patients with advanced disease. Consequently, exercise is increasingly recognised as relevant at all stages of the care pathway. However, prior to referral to palliative care, not all patients have received advice about exercise and this appears based on patient diagnosis; not need. Given the exploratory nature of the study and limited evidence base, qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews from a purposive sample of eight clinical nurse specialists from two different specialties. Analysis was carried out using thematic analysis and interpreted using Leventhal's Common Sense Model of Self-Regulation of Health and Illness. All the participants were aware

of the evidence base to support their referral of patients to exercise interventions and were positive towards this for both advanced COPD and advanced cancer patients. However, the findings indicated that different and often opposite barriers and facilitators to referral were evident between the nursing groups. There appeared to be certainty about referral within the COPD nurses group and often uncertainty within the oncology group. Consequently, almost all COPD patients receive repeated referral for exercise but still many cancer patients are reported to receive none. The identification of factors which influence nurses' decisions to refer patients for exercise appears strongly linked to the current service infrastructure in place. These findings may inform new initiatives aimed at improving access to all patients with advanced disease to receive support and advice to exercise based on their need and not diagnosis.

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