

WEBINAR: Beyond the Basics: a PAH nurse-patient communications initiative Episode 5 – Monday 10 September 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Overview

On Monday 10 September 2018, Actelion hosted a webinar entitled 'Beyond the Basics: a PAH nurse-patient communications initiative'. The webinar featured guest speaker Martha Kingman, an experienced nurse practitioner in the pulmonary hypertension (PH) clinic at UT Southwestern Medical Centre, USA. Martha provided an overview of the Beyond the Basics program and objectives, and discussed the steps involved in running the initiative. The training program aims to improve communication between people with pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH), nurses and the wider holistic care healthcare team, including social workers.

The primary objectives of the webinar were:

- To raise awareness of the psychosocial and quality of life issues related to PAH and the benefits of more effective nurse-patient communication
- To increase understanding of the different goals, motivating factors and barriers to optimizing communication between nurses and patients
- To share and discuss best practice approaches to improve nurse-patient conversations and care

Discussion summary and key learnings

Beyond the Basics: an overview

The Beyond the Basics program is targeted towards nurses and social workers and is currently conducted in 14 cities in the USA. The program incorporates audience participation and practical training, and strives to enhance understanding of the disease and enrich the communication and delivery of care between healthcare professionals and PH patients. After completing the program, participants can opt in for a further mentorship program and receive a tailored toolkit. Evaluation of the program has shown that 100% of participants rated the program as 'excellent'.

The program includes the following subsections:

1. **Case study analysis** – a situational case study e.g. a patient with PAH who learns about pregnancy avoidance, is discussed. The audience is asked to feedback on the situation as to how they would handle it, in order to prompt important discussion and increase awareness as to how goals can be divergent between patient and provider
 2. **Communication techniques** – the social worker in the program focuses on improving communication techniques that could be employed by HCPs to establish a trusting relationship and understand different patient coping strategies
 3. **Anxiety and depression** – two tools (GAD7 and PHQ9) which help patients manage anxiety and depression commonly associated with PAH are reviewed. The role of the social worker and how patients might be screened for anxiety and depression is discussed, and how this is addressed in particularly challenging scenarios such as palliative care and pregnancy
 4. **Social worker function** – the roles of a social worker in caring for patients with PAH such as
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coordinating care, helping the patient to identify an advocate and directing patients to support groups is discussed

5. **Second case study analysis** – a second situational case study is analyzed, again in order to prompt insightful discussions

Overcoming barriers in communication between HCPs and patients

- Lack of time was identified as one of the biggest barriers in successful communication between healthcare providers and patients. Communicating effectively on topics outside the scope of a brief consultation takes time and consideration, which can be overcome by:
 - Identifying a team member in the practice who is best placed to initiate conversations about wider issues, such as intimacy, with patients
 - Adopting easy-to-use tools, such as checklists, that may be helpful in prompting conversations and prevent particular topics being avoided
 - Referring patients to a specialist, such as a counsellor, gynecologist or patient organization, is considered an effective use of time and should ensure important conversations are being carried out by relevant experts
 - Identifying a patient's level of understanding of their condition and personal limitations during early assessment, so that care can be modified and targeted from the first appointment
- Limited resources, such as a lack of PAH specialist centers, privacy or patient-education resources can result in a delay in care, which can be addressed by:
 - Nurses being guided to appreciate the linguistic diversity of patients and those who might have limited English- (or the primary language of healthcare delivery in other countries) reading proficiency. Ensure their challenges are understood by communicating with an interpreter or identifying bilingual healthcare practitioners or social workers who can help in consultation
 - Where there is a lack of PAH specialist centers, social workers can provide holistic tailored care to the patient

Best practice approaches: improving nurse-patient communication

- HCPs are recommended to develop and maintain a 'culturally competent' communication repertoire, incorporating active listening to remove verbal communication barriers and/or provide linguistic assistance
- Improve HCP education in recognizing specific needs of patients so they may make tailored referrals to symptom-based clinics or develop an identified facilitator role to engage in compassionate conversations
- HCPs could document conversations with their patients that address wider issues, like sexual health or intimacy, as a technique to recognize symptom changes and increase the regularity of the conversation
- Develop or attend nurse-patient communication programs which use PAH-trained social workers as part of clinical care

Conclusion

- While PAH-specific communications and counseling strategies to address patients' psychosocial and emotional needs are beneficial, training and techniques are not widely available and only a few centers have access to a social worker
 - Further education and resources are necessary to improve patient communications and access to support services
 - Establishing best practice approaches are essential in addressing the barriers between patient-nurse communications
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For more information on the Beyond the Basics program and nurse-patient communication, please refer to the following webpage:

<http://www.phaonlineuniv.org/ResourceLibrary/Resource.cfm?ItemNumber=6158>

