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Communication skills training in Cancer Care: A Pathway to improve Patient Support

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Communication skills are now recognized as one of the core clinical skills. Communication is also related to patients' psychological adjustment. Communication is particularly stressful for physicians as they have to break bad news, inform patients about highly complex treatment procedures, and ask for informed consent. Physicians moreover have reported that this stress lasts beyond the interaction. It should be recalled that physicians often have to communicate with depressed and anxious patients and their relatives and to deal with uncertainties and fear of death and dying. Physicians need to tailor information to every patient's needs in order to promote recall of information, to facilitate decision-making and to improve satisfaction. Contrary to common social conversation, professional communication are not learnt spontaneously in the course of a clinical career. Health care professionals thus face very diverse and highly complex communication tasks for which they should be trained. In the last two decades, communication skills training programs designed for health care professionals working in cancer care have been the focus of several research endeavors of our group. The efficacy of these communication skills training programs has been tested in studies using a controlled design. All our studies included a microanalysis of patient-physician interactions in simulated and actual consultations. This presentation will review knowledges about communication skills trainings and will focus on challenges for the future in this area.

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