

The role of the clinical nurse specialist

Speakers: Mary Fraser and Mairi MacKinnon Clinical nurse specialists Neuro-oncology

These specialists work in the hospital settings providing support and advice to patients as they undergo treatment and surgery for their tumour types. Patients are referred through surgical clinics and the nurses liaise with all the surgeons on pre operative procedures and post operative support. They act as an important communication channel for the patient and family with the hospital team. They will assess and assist patients in any available clinical research. They give information on all the practical planning and support to the patients as they undergo the relevant CT scans and tests. Most patients will be started on steroids and have a CT scan and MRI whilst they wait for their surgery.

A central role is to listen and assist patients as they see the way ahead. The patients fear 'not waking up' from surgery, being left with significant permanent impairments, experiencing intense pain. Facial disfigurement and hair loss are key concerns.

Patients experience considerable emotion highs and lows. The euphoria of going through surgery and the surgeon explaining how well the procedure went combined with the relief of being alive. This can be followed by the reality of living beyond the surgery and the limitations in their health status and life span. Symptom burdens and deterioration in cognitive and physical abilities all have huge effects on the patient and their families.

The Nurse specialists are highly trained professionals who provide a central communication role in supporting patients as they attend hospital clinics to home discharge. Their final role is to ease the transition to the community resources and the district nurse service. A challenge for the community is to provide a seamless and effective follow up service once a patient is discharged.

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