

**The Contribution of Nurses in Providing Psychosocial Support for Women  
Diagnosed with Breast Cancer**

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## Introduction

Global cancer diagnoses exceeded 19 million in 2020, resulting in approximately 10 million cancer-related deaths. Prevention and early identification of cancer are particularly crucial in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where cancer incidence is projected to increase by 60% by 2030 and access to cancer treatment is limited (Ferlay et al., 2021).

Among female-specific cancers, breast cancer ranks high. Despite an increasing number of cases, the five- and ten-year survival rates for breast cancer are comparatively good (Atoyebi et al., 2023). Consequently, breast cancer survivors encounter a range of treatment-related side effects, such as emotional, mental, and social difficulties. Concerns include a poor self-image, worry, despair, withdrawal from social activities (Hungu et al., 2017), and physical side effects of chemotherapy include thinning hair, uneven skin tone, nausea, vomiting, and an unhealthy way of life. Patients' well-being can be impacted by all of these concerns. Significant changes in appearance brought on by postoperative lymphedema might detract from the self-assurance needed to battle breast cancer and maintain hope for a normal life. In addition, having a strong social support system can help patients better control their negative emotions and take charge of their health.

The experience of being diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer encompasses not just medical challenges, but also emotional and psychological ones. In this context, the role of nurses in offering psychosocial assistance to women diagnosed with breast cancer is of utmost importance. Nurses fulfill a diverse range of responsibilities, including providing care, educating patients, advocating for their needs, and offering emotional support as patients navigate the complexity of their diagnosis and treatment.

According to (Steven et al., 2019), nurses possess distinct benefits compared to breast surgeons, psychiatrists, and rehabilitation physicians due to their intimate and regular interaction with patients. This inherent superiority sets them apart in their ability to comprehend the patients' thoughts and requirements. In addition, nurses can function as intermediaries in facilitating communication between various healthcare practitioners and individuals diagnosed with breast cancer.

Nurses play a crucial role in caregiving by offering vital assistance in handling physical symptoms, providing treatments, and overseeing the general health of patients. Nevertheless, it is in their capacity as sympathetic listeners and compassionate communicators that their influence truly stands out. Nurses provide a comforting presence, establishing a secure environment for patients to articulate their anxieties, worries, and emotional challenges. By actively listening and demonstrating true empathy, they validate patients' feelings and offer reassurance, effectively reducing anxiety and suffering.

In addition, nurses play a crucial role in equipping patients with information and support to manage the psychological and social difficulties associated with breast cancer. Their role involves providing patients

with information regarding their disease, available treatment options, and any adverse effects. This empowers patients to make informed decisions and fosters a sense of ownership over their healthcare journey. In addition, nurses facilitate the connection between patients and support groups, counseling services, and community resources, so promoting a network of emotional and social support that extends beyond the clinical environment.

## **1. Overview of Breast Cancer**

Breast cancer may arise in several regions of the breast, such as the ducts, lobules, or the interstitial tissue. If not identified and treated promptly, it can also metastasize to other regions of the body. Among women worldwide, breast cancer is frequently diagnosed. Breast cancer occurrence may fluctuate among various locations and people, but it is continuously acknowledged as a significant issue in public health.

### **1.1. Breast Cancer Symptoms**

Breast cancer can present with a range of symptoms, which might differ in how they appear and how severe they are in different individuals. Identifying symptoms such as the existence of a lump or mass in the breast, changes in skin texture, or alterations in nipple appearance is essential for promptly seeking medical assessment and quick management. Furthermore, although not all variations in breast tissue are indicative of cancer, maintaining a watchful and proactive approach towards any new or atypical changes can aid in the early detection of cancer and enhance the effectiveness of treatment. The most common symptoms are (Koo et al., 2017):

- **Lump or Thickening in the Breast or Armpit:** A predominant indication of breast cancer is the existence of a lump or mass in the breast tissue. This mass may have a distinct texture compared to the surrounding tissue and may not cause any pain or may be sensitive to touch.
- **Changes in Breast Size or Shape:** Breast cancer can induce alterations in the dimensions or contour of the breast. These symptoms may encompass edema, deformity, or unevenness in breast size.
- **Changes in the Skin:** Breast cancer can induce alterations in the skin of the breast, manifesting as erythema, indentation, or wrinkling. Additionally, the skin may exhibit signs of swelling or inflammation.
- **Nipple Changes:** Alterations in the nipple, such as inversion, retraction, or discharge (except breast milk), may indicate the presence of breast cancer.
- **Breast Pain:** Although breast discomfort is often linked to non-cancerous illnesses, it is important to get persistent or unexplained breast pain assessed by a medical practitioner.

### **1.2. Diagnosis of Breast Cancer**

An essential aspect of diagnosing breast cancer involves conducting a thorough assessment of clinical indications and symptoms, which includes examining the breasts for any abnormalities seen during a

physical examination or reported by the patient. The clinical assessment may entail the manual examination of the breast tissue to detect any abnormal growths or masses, along with a visual examination of the skin and nipples to identify any alterations in their look or texture (Barba et al., 2021). To help in the diagnosis, medical professionals may also ask about symptoms like breast soreness, nipple discharge, or changes in the size or shape of the breasts.

Imaging investigations are crucial in diagnosing breast cancer, working with clinical examination to provide important details regarding the size, location, and features of suspicious lesions in the breast. Mammography, the main kind of imaging used for breast cancer screening, employs low-dose X-rays to identify anomalies like calcifications or masses in the breast tissue (Ma, 2017). Ultrasound and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can be used to examine suspicious findings found during mammography or to identify breast abnormalities in patients with dense breast tissue or other clinical indications.

After performing imaging tests, a conclusive diagnosis of breast cancer usually necessitates the study of tissue samples using minimally invasive techniques such core needle biopsy or surgical excision. Tissue biopsy enables the microscopic examination of breast tissue samples to identify the existence of cancer cells, classify the type of tumor, and evaluate biomarkers that may impact treatment choices. Histopathological assessment also yields crucial prognostic data, such as tumor grade, stage, and hormone receptor status, which impact therapy decisions and prognosis prediction (Zhang et al., 2012).

The diagnosis method for breast cancer involves the integration of clinical assessment, imaging investigations, and pathological examination to accurately identify and describe worrisome lesions in the breast tissue. Timely and precise diagnosis allows for immediate implementation of suitable treatment approaches, including as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and targeted therapies, customized to the individual's unique tumor attributes and general health condition. Healthcare providers employ a comprehensive approach to diagnose and treat breast cancer, aiming to maximize outcomes and enhance survival rates for affected individuals.

### **1.3.Types of Breast Cancer**

Breast cancer is a heterogeneous collection of malignancies that differ in their characteristics, behavior, and treatment strategies. Comprehending the many forms of breast cancer is crucial for precise diagnosis, planning of treatment, and estimation of prognosis.

Breast cancer can be classified into different types based on the precise cells and tissues in the breast where the disease starts. Invasive ductal carcinoma (IDC) is the predominant form of breast cancer, originating from the epithelial cells that line the milk ducts of the breast. Invasive ductal carcinoma (IDC) it has the ability to extend beyond the ducts and invade the nearby breast tissue, and in some cases, it can also travel to other areas of the body (Cuthrell & Tzenios, 2023).

Besides invasive ductal carcinoma, breast cancer can also originate from the lobules, which are the glands in the breast responsible for generating milk. Invasive lobular carcinoma (ILC) is a kind of breast cancer that makes up for 15% of all breast cancer cases (McCart Reed et al., 2021). Invasive lobular carcinoma has a tendency to spread more extensively across the breast tissue and may pose greater difficulty in detection on imaging investigations when compared to invasive ductal carcinoma.

In addition to these two main categories, breast cancer includes a range of subtypes that are distinguished by specific molecular and clinical characteristics. The determination of hormone receptor status, namely estrogen receptor (ER), progesterone receptor (PR), and human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2) status, is essential for classifying breast cancer subtypes and informing treatment choices. Hormone receptor-positive breast cancers, which express estrogen receptors (ER-positive) and/or progesterone receptors (PR-positive), can be effectively treated with hormonal therapies that specifically target these receptors. On the other hand, HER2-positive breast cancers can be effectively treated with targeted therapies that specifically target the HER2 protein.

Besides hormone receptor and HER2 status, breast cancer subtypes can also be categorized according to various molecular markers and clinical characteristics, including histological grade, proliferation rate, and genetic alterations. Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) is a subtype of breast cancer that is characterized by the absence of hormone receptors and HER2 amplification (Borri & Granaglia, 2021). It is a distinct subpopulation of breast cancer with distinctive clinical characteristics and therapy problems.

#### **1.4. Treatment of Breast Cancer**

The treatment of breast cancer is comprehensive and typically includes a blend of surgical, systemic, and radiation therapy customized to the unique tumor features, disease stage, and overall health condition of the individual. The management of breast cancer has been transformed by advancements in treatment modalities and individualized medicine, resulting in improved results and quality of life for individuals affected by this disease.

- Surgery

Surgery is a crucial component in the management of breast cancer and can encompass either breast-conserving surgery (lumpectomy) or mastectomy, depending on the tumor's size and location, as well as the patient's choices and medical factors. The objective of breast-conserving surgery is to excise the malignant tissue while maintaining the maximum amount of breast tissue, thereafter complemented with radiation therapy to minimize the likelihood of local recurrence. Mastectomy is a surgical procedure that involves the complete removal of the breast. It is typically advised for persons with big tumors or certain tumor features.

- Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy employs powerful beams of high-energy radiation to specifically target and eliminate cancerous cells. This treatment is commonly administered after breast-conserving surgery in order to minimize the likelihood of cancer returning in the same area. Additionally, it can be employed in specific instances following mastectomy or as a component of palliative therapy to improve symptoms in advanced stages of the disease. Radiation therapy is usually delivered over a span of multiple weeks and might result in side effects such as fatigue, skin irritation, and alterations in the look of the breast.

- Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a treatment that utilizes chemicals to eliminate cancer cells or hinder their development. It can be given prior to surgery (neoadjuvant chemotherapy) to minimize the size of the tumor, or after surgery (adjuvant chemotherapy) to lower the chances of the cancer coming back. Chemotherapy protocols differ based on the specific tumor attributes, overall health condition, and treatment objectives of each individual (Chu & Sartorelli, 2018).

- Hormonal Therapy

Hormonal therapy, commonly referred to as endocrine therapy, is employed to inhibit the impact of estrogen or progesterone on hormone receptor-positive breast tumors. It might be recommended as an additional therapy after surgery for tumors that are sensitive to hormones or as a medication to relieve symptoms for cancer that has spread.

- Targeted Therapy

Targeted therapy seeks to obstruct specific molecular pathways implicated in cancer growth and advancement, thereby augmenting treatment effectiveness and reducing toxicity. Targeted medicines can specifically target proteins, such as HER2 (human epidermal growth factor receptor 2), that are excessively produced in around 20% of breast tumors (Wahdan-Alaswad et al., 2020). HER2-targeted treatments, such as trastuzumab, pertuzumab, and ado-trastuzumab emtansine, have significantly transformed the treatment of HER2-positive breast cancer, leading to notable enhancements in outcomes and survival rates.

## **2. Importance of Psychosocial Support in Breast Cancer Care**

Cancer is not solely a physiological ailment; it is a profound and multifaceted encounter that affects every facet of an individual's existence. In addition to the physical symptoms of the disease, cancer presents a wide range of emotional, social, and psychological difficulties that can greatly damage the overall health and quality of life of those impacted by the illness.

The significance of providing psychosocial support in cancer care cannot be emphasized enough. The program caters to the whole requirements of persons impacted by cancer, including emotional anguish, social seclusion, practical difficulties, and existential worries. Psychosocial support interventions provide a secure environment for individuals to articulate their anxieties, exchange their personal encounters, and obtain the required resources and support networks to manage the difficulties associated with diagnosis, treatment, recovery, and end-of-life care.

- Emotional Well-being

A cancer diagnosis frequently elicits a broad spectrum of emotions, such as fear, anxiety, grief, and rage. Psychosocial assistance offers individuals a secure environment to articulate and analyze these emotions, assisting them in managing the difficulties associated with diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship. Emotional support has the ability to ease feelings of distress, raise mood, and promote general well-being throughout the experience of cancer (Acquati et al., 2023).

- Quality of Life

The presence of cancer and its treatment can have a profound effect on multiple facets of an individual's life, encompassing physical capabilities, interpersonal connections, professional endeavors, and recreational pursuits. Psychosocial support seeks to comprehensively address these concerns, assisting individuals in preserving or enhancing their quality of life in spite of the obstacles presented by cancer. Psychosocial therapies improve resilience and well-being by offering practical aid, emotional support, and coping techniques.

- Adaptation

Individuals facing cancer must effectively manage a variety of stressors, including as uncertainty regarding the future, side effects of treatment, and alterations in body image and self-worth. Psychosocial assistance provides individuals with the necessary tools and techniques to effectively manage and overcome these obstacles by developing coping skills and resilience-building tactics. By engaging in counseling, participating in support groups, and attending educational programs, individuals acquire the necessary skills to adjust to the challenges posed by cancer and cultivate effective methods to manage stress and navigate ambiguity.

- Social Support

The presence of cancer can have a tremendous effect on the dynamics of relationships with family, friends, and caregivers, resulting in feelings of isolation and solitude. Psychosocial support facilitates interpersonal connections among those who share similar experiences, thereby promoting a sense of belonging and camaraderie. Support groups, peer mentoring programs, and online communities provide opportunities for social support, motivation, and shared experiences, which help decrease feelings of

isolation and improve social connectedness (de Souza Vargas et al., 2020).

- Treatment Adherence and Outcomes

Psychosocial factors have the potential to impact treatment adherence, recovery, and long-term results in cancer therapy. Individuals who receive sufficient psychosocial support are more inclined to comply with treatment suggestions, adopt healthy behaviors, and actively engage in their own care. Healthcare professionals can boost treatment outcomes, decrease hospitalizations, and improve overall patient happiness and well-being by attending to psychosocial needs.

### **3. Role of Nurses in Providing Psychosocial Support**

Nurses play a crucial role in providing comprehensive care for persons impacted by cancer, acting as empathetic caretakers, champions, and educators throughout the entire cancer experience. In addition to their professional proficiency, nurses possess a distinctive capacity to offer psychosocial assistance, attending to the emotional, social, and psychological requirements of patients and their families with empathy, sensitivity, and comprehension.

- Compassionate Caregivers

Nurses play a key role in cancer care, offering direct assistance and solace to patients throughout their whole cancer experience. Nurses establish a therapeutic atmosphere by being empathetic and actively listening, thereby making patients feel appreciated, esteemed, and nurtured. Nurses provide crucial support to persons navigating the difficulties of cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship by fostering trusting relationships based on understanding and compassion (Kim et al., 2022).

- Emotional Support

Dealing with cancer can elicit a broad spectrum of feelings, including fear, anxiety, grief, and uncertainty. Nurses have a vital role in addressing the emotional needs of patients going through the challenges of cancer. They provide empathy and support, lending a sympathetic ear and a calming presence. Nurses create a secure environment for patients to openly share their emotions, address their worries, and seek comfort during difficult times by actively listening, validating their sentiments, and communicating with empathy.

- Patient Advocates

Nurses act as strong advocates for patients, guaranteeing that their opinions are acknowledged, their worries are dealt with, and their entitlements are honored throughout the entire process of cancer care (Ciria-Suarez et al., 2021). Nurses empower patients by advocating for personalized treatment plans, facilitating communication with healthcare providers, and guiding them through intricate healthcare systems, enabling patients to make well-informed decisions and actively engage in their own care.



- Educators and Resource Providers

Nurses not only offer emotional support, but also fulfill the roles of educators and resource givers. They empower patients and their families with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively handle the practical and psychosocial aspects of cancer care. Nurses play a crucial role in empowering those affected by cancer by providing them with information about treatment options and potential side effects. Additionally, nurses help patients navigate complex healthcare systems and connect them with support services. This support is essential in helping individuals make informed decisions and access the necessary resources to cope with the challenges of illness.

#### **4. Psychosocial Nursing Interventions in Breast Cancer Care**

Nurses in breast cancer care have a vital role in addressing the psychosocial needs of patients through a range of interventions. Nurses utilize therapeutic communication approaches to foster trust and encourage open discourse with patients regarding their experiences, problems, and preferences (Arkorful et al., 2021). Nurses establish a supportive atmosphere by actively listening, showing empathy, and validating patients' emotions, thereby ensuring that patients feel heard, comprehended, and esteemed.

In addition, nurses offer instruction and knowledge regarding cancer diagnosis, treatment alternatives, and resources for supportive care. This enables patients and their families to make well-informed choices about their healthcare. Their purpose is to correct misunderstandings, explain uncertainties, and offer advice on how to manage symptoms, implement self-care techniques, and access support resources. According to (Benson et al., 2020), nurses facilitate psychosocial support groups to help those impacted by breast cancer interact with others who have similar experiences. In these groups, participants can exchange support and information, and get perspective and encouragement from their peers. Support groups offer a feeling of inclusion, affirmation, and communal assistance that helps ease emotions of seclusion and solitude.

Nurses are equipped with the necessary skills to offer crisis intervention and emotional support to persons who are going through acute distress, anxiety, or crisis circumstances that are connected to a breast cancer diagnosis, treatment side effects, or disease progression. They provide prompt assistance, techniques for managing stress, and recommendations for suitable resources to meet patients' urgent requirements and guarantee their security and welfare (Memaryan et al., 2016).

Nurses work together with a team of healthcare practitioners from several disciplines to address the intricate psychosocial needs of patients impacted by breast cancer. They engage in care planning, coordination, and implementation of comprehensive interventions that incorporate medical, psychological, and social dimensions of care.

Finally, nurses aid individuals in cultivating and enhancing coping abilities and fortitude, offering

direction on stress mitigation methods, relaxation routines, mindfulness exercises, and constructive coping tactics. This assistance improves patients' capacity to adjust and manage the challenges associated with a breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. Nurses offer a wide variety of interventions to give crucial psychosocial support, which improves the well-being and quality of life for those impacted by breast cancer.

### **5. Challenges Nurses Face in Providing Psychosocial Support**

Nurses in the field of cancer care encounter numerous obstacles and impediments when it comes to provide psychosocial support. These issues can impede their capacity to adequately meet the emotional, social, and psychological requirements of patients and their families. Nurses frequently face time constraints and severe workloads that restrict their ability to allocate sufficient time to psychosocial care alongside their other duties (Chen et al., 2017). In addition, nurses may feel inadequately prepared to address intricate emotional matters and offer suitable assistance due to a deficiency in specialized training in psychosocial care.

Furthermore, the negative perception associated with mental health problems can be a substantial obstacle to the provision of psychosocial support, affecting both those seeking care and healthcare professionals (Inhestern et al., 2016). Patients may experience hesitancy in seeking assistance for emotional issues as a result of apprehension of judgment or social disapproval, while healthcare providers may encounter difficulty in initiating conversations about mental well-being due to perceived social disapproval or unease.

Moreover, nurses may face obstacles in delivering complete psychosocial care to patients due to restricted availability of resources and supportive services. poor availability of mental health experts, support groups, counseling services, and other resources can lead to feelings of isolation and inadequate support among patients, especially in underserved or rural areas with poor healthcare infrastructure.

Notwithstanding these difficulties and obstacles, nurses have a vital function in championing and attending to the psychosocial requirements of cancer patients. Nurses may assist address the gap in psychosocial care for individuals with cancer by lobbying for more resources, training opportunities, and supportive services. This will guarantee that patients receive comprehensive support to cope with the challenges of cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship.

### **Conclusion**

It is crucial to prioritize the psychological and social needs of those impacted by breast cancer in order to offer comprehensive and all-encompassing care throughout their experience with the disease. Nurses are essential in this undertaking, employing their knowledge, compassion, and commitment to assist patients and their families in navigating the emotional, social, and psychological difficulties associated with cancer diagnosis, treatment, recovery, and end-of-life care. Nurses utilize several interventions to improve well-

being, encourage resilience, and cultivate meaningful relationships with patients.

Nevertheless, nurses face a multitude of obstacles and impediments when providing psychological care, such as limited time, inadequate training, social stigma, and restricted access to resources. Notwithstanding these challenges, nurses persist in their dedication to championing and attending to the psychosocial requirements of patients, making efforts to surmount obstacles and guarantee that individuals obtain the assistance and provisions essential for managing the emotional and psychological consequences of cancer.

The dedication, compassion, and commitment of nurses in providing psychological support are extremely essential in assisting persons impacted by breast cancer to negotiate the intricacies of their condition with dignity, fortitude, and perseverance. Nurses have a significant impact on patients and their families by providing comfort, support, and hope in challenging situations.

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