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EDUCATION IN ONCOLOGY

Implementation of the European educational programme "Learning to live with cancer": How participants evaluate the seminars "Education of educators"

S. Berat, A. Djurdjevic, Z. Neskovic-Konstantinovic, Lj. Vuckovic-Dekic
Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia

Summary

Purpose: *To assess the need and willing for education of oncology experts for the implementation of the European Educational Programme (EEP) "Learning to live with cancer", and to analyze how participants evaluated the first 3 seminars "Education of educators".*

Materials and methods: *In March, April and May 2003, three 3-day seminars entitled "Education of educators" for implementing the EEP "Learning to live with cancer" were organized by a certified educator team of the Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia, Belgrade. The attendees (n= 70) answered a questionnaire specially constructed in order to assess their previous knowledge about the topics of the seminar, their satisfaction with the content of the seminar, their attitude towards implementation of what they learned in daily routine practice, and their willingness to continue such an education in the future.*

Results: *Education of patients and their families was not a part of daily routine practice of 79% of the attendees, and 88.6% of them thought that their patients would benefit from the implementation of the EEP. The knowledge acquired during the seminars was completely or partially new for 76% of the participants, and 96% of them thought that similar seminars should be organized on a regular basis – once a year. Readiness to participate actively in future seminars expressed 64% of the attendees, and all of them suggested topics they thought most interesting for their practice.*

Conclusion: *The content of the three seminars satisfied the great majority of the attendees. Their positive attitude and willingness to implement what they have learned in their practice confirmed the need to apply the EEP in the holistic treatment of cancer patients.*

Key words: cancer patients, education, educators

Introduction

The WHO Declaration on human rights includes, among others, the fundamental human right to information about the disease and therapy. The EEP "Learning to live with cancer" for cancer patients and their families was introduced at the University of Lund, Sweden, in 1995 [1]. The aim of the EEP is: a) to promote a patient's understanding of his/her overall situation in being a cancer-diagnosed person by increasing his/her knowledge regarding the malignant disease and the experience of having cancer; b) to reduce the patient's experiences of anxiety and fear; c) to support the patient in developing coping strategies for managing the situation; and d) to empower the patient's acting ability when adjusting to a changed life situation.

In three workshops held in 1996 and 1997, experts from 23 European countries were educated, qualified and certified to run "Learning to live with cancer" courses for patients and their family members. At the Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia, the EEP is included in the holistic therapy of cancer patients since 1998 [2].

At the European workshop for education of educators [3], we were obliged to transfer the knowledge on education of patients to the oncology experts in our

Correspondence to: Dr. Ljiljana Vuckovic-Dekic. Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia. Pasterova 14, 11000 Beograd, Serbia.
Tel: + 381 11 2067 212, E-mail: ljvd@ncrc.ac.yu

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surroundings. In order to achieve this goal, in 2003 we organized three seminars targeted to the education of educators.

In this report, we present the results of the participants' evaluation of these seminars.

Materials and methods

Seventy participants (physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and specialists in psychosocial rehabilitation) attended three seminars held during 2003. The characteristics of the attendees are presented in Table 1. The attendees were people who participated in the cancer patients' therapy, and who were interested to learn more about education of patients according to the EEP "Learning to live with cancer". The specific goals of the seminars were: a) to teach the participants about the nature of education of patients and their families; and b) to improve their understanding of the specific needs and requirements for information, as well as for psycho-emotional support of cancer patients and their relatives. Five topics were:

1. Education as part of rehabilitation
2. Transfer of knowledge about disease and its treatment.
3. Learning about experiences and attitude during disease.
4. Communication and learning – didactic aspects of the group education.
5. How to start with the educational programme for patients and the members of their families in our surroundings.

The attendees evaluated the seminar using a specific questionnaire consisting of 8 questions (Table 2). Additional space was provided for any comments and suggestions.

Table 1. Characteristics of the attendees

Characteristic	*n*	*%*
Gender		
male	7	10
female	63	90
Age (years)		
median	37.5	
range	26-53	
Residence		
Serbia	53	76
Montenegro	6	9
Bosnia & Herzegovina	11	15
Profession		
physician	45	65
nurse	13	19
senior medical sister	9	13
specialist in rehabilitation	1	1
psychologist	1	1
social worker	1	1

Results

The majority of the attendees (79%) practised neither education of patients nor had they ever attended such a seminar. Most (88.6%) thought that what they learned during the seminar can be applied in their daily routine practice and could be beneficial for their patients.

The content of the seminar was either completely or partially new for 33% and 43% of attendees, respectively. No relevant literature was in the possession of the attendees (21%) previously.

Almost all of them (95.7%) expressed their opinion that similar seminars should be organized once a

Table 2. Evaluation checklist

Questions	*Answers (%)*		
	Yes	*No*	*Yes, partly*
Do you practise education of patients by means presented at this seminar?	21	79	
Do you think that the contents of the seminars can be applied and be beneficial for your patients?	88.6	11.4	
Have you participated in such a seminar (on education of patients) before?	21	79	
Does the content of the seminar is a novelty for you?	33	24	43
Do you have literature relevant to the topics presented at this seminar?	79	21	
Do you think that a 3-day seminar is sufficient for such an education?	87	13	
Do you think that such seminars should be organized on a regular basis (once a year)?	95.7	4.3	
Are you interested to participate in future seminars as a lecturer?	64	36	

year, and that the 3-day duration is sufficient for this purpose (87%). Forty-five attendees (64%) were interested to participate actively (as lecturers) in future seminars (Table 2).

In written comments, the attendees emphasized that the main obstacles to implement the EEP in their workplaces were financial problems and difficulties to organize a multiprofessional team.

Discussion

Taken altogether, the attendees highly evaluated the content and organization of the seminars. Most of them think that the need for implementation of the EEP in the global health care of patients suffering from cancer does exist, and that education of educators is very welcome.

For organizers, particularly important were the suggestions and proposals for the topics of future seminars - communication with patients, palliative care (hospices, pain control, family therapy, alternative medicine), talk to dying patients, how to communicate bad news, psychooncology, and "burn-out" syndrome. The health workers from oncology dispensaries, and those taking care of outpatients (home visits) are particularly interested in palliative care, since they are often taking care of patients in the terminal phase of cancer.

All participants expressed their wish to continue the collaboration with the multiprofessional team (specialist in rehabilitation, physicians, senior nurses, nutritionists, psychologist, social worker) of the Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia, this team being the very first in the Balkan region that practises the EEP in daily routine [2,4], as recommended earlier [5-9]. The satisfaction of the patients included in the EEP (improved quality of life and self-esteem) [10,11] was the most important motivation for the attendees to organize similar seminars in which educated experts would be enabled to implement the EEP in their surroundings.

Four years after the completion of the "Education of educators" seminars, the attendees informed us that they still praise the programme and seminars. However, except the Oncology Center of Loznica, which started the implementation of the European programme in 2004 (Vrbovac M, personal communication), all other centers failed to introduce and implement the EEP. This was not because of misunderstanding of the local authorities, but mainly because of poverty - shortage of money and equipment, non-educated team, and the lack of interest of many professionals to work on a voluntary basis. We think that this is a sad situation, since the experience of the team of the Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia shows that patients appreciate very much the benefit for being included in the EEP [12]. Recent information that the Oncology Center of Valjevo, Serbia, will start the implementation in March 2008 (Krstevska V, personal communication), rises hope that several others centers will follow in due course.

In conclusion, it is evident that both need and willingness to implement the European programme into the treatment of cancer patients do exist, but that still there are obstacles that will not be easily overcome.

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