

Abstract

Nurses' Knowledge and Practices Regarding Fertility Preservation in Oncology Patients: An Observational Study

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Introduction. Cancer drugs can cause damage to the reproductive system, compromising fertility and the quality of life of people with cancer, both during and after the disease. According to the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), nurses play a central role in educating cancer patients about fertility preservation (FP). However, the assessment of sexual health needs remains under-recognized in nursing practice, highlighting the need for further investigation of this topic. The aim of this study was to evaluate nurses' knowledge and practices regarding fertility preservation in people with oncological diseases.

Methods. A cross-sectional observational study was conducted between January and February 2024. Nurses from three hospitals in Bari were invited to participate. Data were collected through the online administration of a 35-item questionnaire divided into five sections: sociodemographic characteristics, FP training, experience with FP treatments, knowledge of FP, and FP practices.

Results. Fifty nurses participated, of whom 68% (n = 34) were women, 34% (n = 17) were younger than 30 years, and 74% (n = 36) worked in medical settings. Only 34% (n = 17) had received adequate training in FP. Most nurses reported never having cared for patients undergoing oocyte preservation (46%; n = 23) or sperm cryopreservation (38%; n = 19). Overall, 44% (n = 22) were unfamiliar with sperm cryopreservation treatments, while only 12% (n = 6) were familiar with oocyte preservation treatments. Forty percent (n = 20) reported rarely discussing fertility-related topics with patients, whereas 48% (n = 24) had referred patients to a fertility specialist during the previous year.

Discussion. Nurses' perceived knowledge of FP and their current practices highlight the need to develop targeted educational strategies to safeguard fertility and improve the quality of life of oncology patients. Beginning with the assessment of sexual health needs, nurses can plan interventions aimed at promoting education about fertility preservation and strengthening patient empowerment.

Keywords: Fertility Preservation, Nurses, Empowerment

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