

CFAHR Evidence Brief

Communication skills training for health professionals working in cancer care

Authors and Affiliations

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Alignment with [Metro South Health Research Strategy 2019 - 2024](#)

- Build research capability
- Increase research capacity
- Embed research in clinical services
- Translate research to better health
- Research excellence

Alignment with [Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2017 - 2020](#)

- Engage staff as research consumers
- Enable staff as research generators
- Build research-enabling infrastructure and strategic processes
- Strengthen leadership in research and innovation
- Enhance internal research collaboration and synergy
- Strengthen partnerships with consumers and external stakeholders

Alignment with [Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2017 - 2020](#)

- Standard 1 – Clinical Governance
- Standard 2 – Partnering with consumers
- Standard 3 – Preventing and controlling healthcare-associated infection
- Standard 4 – Medication safety
- Standard 5 – Comprehensive care
- Standard 6 – Communicating for safety
- Standard 7 – Blood management
- Standard 8 – Recognising and responding to acute deterioration

Practice Issue

For the past 10 years, the PAH Division of Cancer Services has delivered a 1-day communication skills training program (CARE: Communicating Actively, Responding Empathically) for health professionals working in cancer care. However competing service demands have limited staff participation. Hence a modified 2-hour version (CARE Express) was developed to address this issue. This pilot study aimed to examine the effectiveness of CARE Express compared with CARE and a control group, across measures of health professional confidence, focus on psychosocial care and communication skills. We hypothesised that the modified CARE Express would not be as effective at changing health professional communication skills, with reduced maintenance of skills over time, when compared with the 1-day CARE program.

Evidence

Cancer care health professionals (n= 147) were recruited from allied health, nursing and medical disciplines, using a partial randomisation to allocate to three arms: control, two-hour training (CARE Express) and 1-day training (CARE). Perceived confidence and skills were measured by self-report using a purpose-built scale, and written responses to a challenging clinical encounter were obtained at baseline, post-training and three-months post-training. Attitudes toward psychosocial issues were evaluated with the Physician Belief Scale at baseline and 3 months post-training. No changes were observed in the control group (n= 50) from baseline to 3 months follow-up. Participants in the CARE Express (n=48) and CARE (n= 49) groups had significant improvement in confidence in identifying/responding to emotions between baseline and 3 months post-training ($p < 0.001$), as well as their attitude toward psychosocial care ($p < 0.001$). A significant increase in “acknowledging” responses from baseline to 3 months was also observed for CARE Express and CARE ($p < 0.001$), with no difference between groups..

Practice Change

CARE Express training is now delivered via Leap Online routinely throughout the year and is an expected training for those working in cancer care. Extensions to this work are now offered to administration staff working in Division of Cancer Services, and to allied health students at the University of Queensland.

Publication/s

Nixon, J., Gray, L., Turner, J., Bernard, A., Scaife, J., & Cartmill, B. (2018). Communicating Actively Responding Empathically (CARE): Comparison of communication training workshops for health professionals working in cancer care. *Journal of Cancer Education*, doi:10.1007/s13187-018-1439-0

Adapted from Tilley Pain (Townsville HHS)

Based on the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association's Health Policy Evidence Brief

Metro South Health Research Strategy 2019 – 2024 https://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2325000/research-strategy.pdf

Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2017 – 2020 <https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/allied-health-research-strategy.pdf>

National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Overview-of-the-NSQHS-Standards-second-edition.pdf>