Mandatory communication skills training for cancer and palliative care staff: does one size fit all?
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English abstract

Purpose of the research: There is increasing recognition of the importance of good communication between healthcare professionals and patients facing cancer or end of life. In England, a new national 3-day training programme called ‘Connected’ has been developed and is now mandatory for all cancer and palliative care professionals. This study aimed to explore the attitudes of staff in one region to undertaking this training.

Methods and sample: A survey questionnaire was developed through a series of discussions with experts and semi-structured interviews with five healthcare professionals. The questionnaire was distributed to 200 cancer and palliative care staff; 109 were completed and returned.

Key results: There were significant differences between doctors’ and nurses’ attitudes to communication skills training, with doctors demonstrating more negative attitudes. More nurses than doctors felt that communication skills training should be mandatory for cancer and palliative care professionals (p ≤ 0.001), whilst more doctors felt that these staff should already be skilled communicators and not require further training (p ≤ 0.001). Nurses also self-rated their communication skills more highly than doctors.

Conclusions: The current ‘one size fits all’ approach being taken nationally to advanced communication skills training does not meet the training preferences of all healthcare professionals, and it is recommended that tailoring courses to individuals’ needs should be considered.