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Patients' experiences of coping with nodal relapse of melanoma

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Patients who develop nodal relapse of malignant melanoma often move from a potentially curable to a life-threatening or palliative condition. During this transition period, many individuals experience unmet support needs. This exploratory, qualitative study provides an insight into patients' experience of nodal relapse of malignant melanoma. Using a qualitative design the target population was a convenience sample of patients with nodal relapse of malignant melanoma, who had a surgical block dissection of lymph glands in the neck, axilla or groin within the last two years. The sample size was six participants. One-to-one interviews were conducted with the participants. Findings indicated that the participants experienced a transition process from the initial diagnosis of malignant melanoma to nodal relapse. This transition appeared to commence at the point of their initial diagnosis in that, the participants began to consider and understand their risk of nodal relapse. They appeared to continue to develop coping skills to live with this threat and displayed anticipatory coping skills when they developed nodal relapse and refocused their lives. However, anger was often expressed. Some of the pertinent needs identified for patients with nodal relapse of malignant melanoma include: information on the longer-term physical effects following surgery and a more holistic approach to review arrangements. These findings demonstrate areas of practice which could be addressed by health professionals during routine clinical care of patients with nodal relapse of malignant melanoma. These findings could also inform the development of services to meet the specific information and support needs of this unique patient group.

Biography

Sheena Stothers is a Complex Skin Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist working as part of a Multidisciplinary Team within the Regional Plastic Surgery Unit in Northern Ireland for patients who have complex skin cancers that require reconstruction, have metastatic disease or require oncology referral. She has obtained her BSc in Health Studies from Queens University Belfast and then completed her MSc in Advanced Nursing from the University of Ulster. She continues to pursue her research interests in the patients' experiences of various aspects of their skin cancer treatment.

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