ABSTRACT
EFFECTS OF SPIRITUAL CARE EDUCATION ON PEDIATRIC NURSES’ KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND COMPETENCE

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Marquette University, 2015

Holistic nursing care embraces the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of the patient and family, with a focus placed on providing support, reducing suffering, and enhancing quality of life. Yet there are distinct barriers in education that lead many nurses to feel unprepared to provide spiritual care to address patients’ spiritual needs in practice. This study employed a prospective, longitudinal design to evaluate the effects of a three-hour online spiritual care educational program on pediatric oncology nurses’ perceived attitudes towards and knowledge of spirituality/spiritual care and their perceived competence to provide spiritual care to children with cancer at the end of life. This design was framed by Narayanasamy’s Actioning Spirituality and Spiritual Care Education and Training in Nursing (ASSET) model.

Participants, including 112 pediatric nurses who provide care to children with cancer, completed a theory-driven spiritual care educational program. Online multimedia content was supplemented with asynchronous interaction in a discussion forum. A one-way repeated-measures analysis of variance was conducted to compare mean scores on nurses’ perceived attitudes towards and knowledge of spirituality/spiritual care at baseline, immediately after completion of the program, and three-months after completion of the program. Analyses indicated a very large effect from the educational program over time. A one-way repeated measures analysis of variance compared mean scores of nurses’ perceived level of spiritual care competence at baseline, immediately after a participant’s completion of the program, and three-months after a participant’s completion of the program. The educational program had a very large effect on nurses’ perceived level of spiritual care competence. A linear regression found a positive relationship between the total change score in nurses’ attitudes towards and knowledge of spirituality/spiritual care and the total change score in nurses’ level of perceived spiritual care competence.

Online spiritual care educational initiatives can exert a meaningful effect on pediatric oncology nurses’ knowledge, attitudes, and competence to provide spiritual care. The ASSET model provides a useful framework for conceptualizing and investigating the effects of spiritual care educational initiatives. Results from this study address a gap in knowledge to advance nursing science and serve as a foundation for further investigation.