

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TRAINING FOR PALLIATIVE VOLUNTEERS' MOTIVATION FOR PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TO BREAST CANCER PATIENTS

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ABSTRACT

Motivation plays a critical role in enabling palliative volunteers to provide effective psychosocial support to breast cancer patients. The negative psychological problems patients face often pose challenges for volunteers, as each patient requires a personal approach. Thus, good communication skills are essential, and training in effective communication can enhance volunteers' motivation to optimize psychosocial assistance. This study aimed to measure the effect of effective communication training on the motivation of palliative volunteers in supporting breast cancer patients in Batu City, Indonesia. This research employed a pre-experimental design with a pre-and post-test approach. A total of 45 palliative volunteers were recruited for this study. The training, which included role-playing exercises and group discussions, was conducted over a period of five weeks. Data were collected using the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS with the Paired-Samples t-Test. The results showed a significant increase in volunteer motivation after the training. Statistical tests confirmed a significant improvement in motivation scores after the training. This study highlights the positive impact of effective communication training on increasing volunteer motivation. It underscores the importance of nurses collaborating with volunteers to address the psychosocial needs of breast cancer patients through empathetic listening and effective communication.

Keywords: *Breast cancer; effective communication; motivation; palliative volunteer; psychosocial needs*



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BACKGROUND

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women worldwide. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) reported that the Asian continent has the highest incidence of cancer in the world (Bray et al., 2024; Sung et al., 2021). In Indonesia, breast cancer is the most regularly treated cancer in hospitals, making up 58,256 cases or 16.7% of 348,809 overall cancer cases (Gautama, 2022; Supriati et al., 2023). Breast cancer's disease trajectory, from accepting the diagnosis, undergoing treatments, understanding the prognosis, handling possible side effects, managing fear of recurrence and uncertain future, are all unpleasant stages that can cause the patients to experience

emotional and psychological problems (Dinapoli, Colloca, Di Capua, & Valentini, 2021; Sajjadi, Brant, Bahri, Abbaszadeh, & Rassouli, 2016; Supriati et al., 2022).

A large proportion of breast cancer patients experience multiple concurrent psychological symptoms during their cancer care trajectory, such as distress, anxiety, depression, cognitive impairment, body image, and sexual dysfunction. These issues lead patients to withdraw from society, avoid hospital visits for treatment, and become more sensitive (Dinapoli et al., 2021; Tisnasari, Nuraini, & Afyanti, 2022). Psychological support for cancer patients is now recognized as a fundamental aspect of treatment pathways (Civillotti et

al., 2023; Mo, Lai, Mo, Li, & Zhu, 2022). A previous study explains that of all types of cancer, breast cancer patients require the most psychological care (Tisnasari et al., 2022). The psychosocial needs of breast cancer patients include emotional, affectional, spiritual support, and social function abilities. Supporting patients with these will enable them to fulfill their roles and function well in society (Aamir et al., 2022; Hasnani & Mumpuni, 2023; Vos, 2015).

Breast cancer patients require holistic care that encompasses their physical and psychological needs (Aamir et al., 2022; Civilotti et al., 2023). A form of holistic care that encompasses all aspects of chronic illness, including breast cancer, is called palliative care (Nuraini, Andrijono, Irawaty, Umar, & Gayatri, 2018; D. A. Sari, Nasution, & Zulfendri, 2023). Palliative care aims to improve the quality of life for patients facing life-limiting illnesses (Hidayat et al., 2024). This form of care is an integrated service provided by a palliative team, including a palliative volunteer (Coleman, Sanderson-Thomas, & Walshe, 2022; Tisnasari et al., 2022). To improve professional services and sustainable health, the community is also involved in voluntary palliative care as volunteers (Coleman et al., 2022; Giancaspro & Manuti, 2021; Oyedepo, 2024). Volunteers support patients in identifying their psychological and social needs, resolving problems, and assisting with decision-making processes related to breast cancer (Coleman et al., 2022; D. A. Sari et al., 2023). Volunteers are integral to palliative care, especially in addressing psychosocial domains that may fall outside routine clinical interactions (D. A. Sari et al., 2023). These psychosocial needs are crucial for the healing process of breast cancer patients. Such support is crucial for helping patients accept their condition and recognize that they are still surrounded by people who care about them (Anu et al., 2022; Putra et al., 2022).

Furthermore, volunteers play a crucial role in providing motivation, understanding, and reinforcement to patients, demonstrating that they are valuable and meaningful to their families (Toncheva-Zlatkova, 2023; Vočanec, Lončarek, Banadinović, Sović, & Džakula, 2022). Becoming a palliative volunteer requires motivation to carry out their role in palliative activities. Palliative volunteers play a unique role in enhancing the quality of patient and family care by providing emotional support to help patients avoid feelings of hopelessness and depression (Coleman et al., 2022; Mo et al., 2022; N. P. W. P. Sari & Sari, 2019).

Volunteers also play a role in mentoring and counseling for treatment compliance, follow-up on patient care by the palliative team, and assisting with rehabilitation and overcoming financial difficulties. Findings from the preliminary study conducted in Batu City indicated that most volunteers considered themselves ill-equipped for their work, resulting in patients lacking the trust and confidence to seek support from the volunteers. In addition, volunteers also feel that they lack sufficient knowledge, are uncomfortable explaining the prognosis and patient care, and are confused about patient information data. As a result, volunteers are perceived as less communicative and ineffective in motivating breast cancer patients.

Moreover, good communication in palliative care can support the patient's psychological well-being, clinical outcomes, and satisfaction with the care received (Engel, Kars, Teunissen, & van der Heide, 2023; Khoshnazar et al., 2016). Effective communication skills are a common challenge experienced by volunteers in providing psychosocial assistance to patients in palliative care (Bauer & Lim, 2019; Agustina et al., 2023).

Existing communication training workshops aim to enhance volunteers' motivation and capabilities in approaching patients and families dealing with breast cancer. These workshops focus on enhancing volunteers' communication strategies, including empathetic listening, active engagement, normalizing experiences, exercising restraint, reflection, validation, and employing hopeful language. Nevertheless, volunteers require additional training and support to deliver better palliative care, particularly in terms of communication skills, through interactive teaching methods (Bauer & Lim, 2019).

There is limited research focused on providing effective communication training to palliative volunteers, aiming to enhance their motivation and specific communication skills. However, volunteers need to receive communication training to boost their motivation and refresh their knowledge about communication for supporting breast cancer patients. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study on the impact of communication training on the motivation of palliative volunteers who provide psychosocial support to breast cancer patients in Batu City.

METHOD

Study design

This study employed a one-group pre-and post-test design without a control group. The researchers selected this design to assess the differences in palliative volunteers' motivation in providing the psychosocial needs of breast cancer patients in one intervention group without a control group.

Samples

This study was conducted at a hospital in Batu City, East Java, which offers palliative care services. The data were collected from May to October 2023. The population consisted of 45 palliative volunteers. The researchers used the total sampling technique. Thus, the sample size consisted of 45 respondents, who were grouped into the intervention group.

Intervention

The researchers implemented the intervention in a single group without a comparison group. The pre-test was administered in the first week prior to the intervention, while the post-test was conducted in the fifth week after all instructional materials had been delivered. In this study, communication training was conducted over five weeks and comprised four training material sessions: information about breast cancer and its treatment, the role of palliative volunteers in addressing the psychosocial needs of breast cancer patients, principles of effective communication, and role-plays of effective communication interactions addressing psychosocial needs. Each session lasted 90 minutes, consisting of a lecture and a small group discussion. The researchers delivered the training in a face-to-face setting and employed a structured module.

The materials were developed and validated by a multidisciplinary team comprising psychiatric nurses, maternity nurses, and palliative care medical doctors. The researchers measured the palliative volunteers' differences before and after training at five weeks. The training module served as a guide for providing effective communication training, developed through team discussions and reviewed through focus group discussions. Details of the intervention are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of the intervention

	Intervention session	Duration	Purpose
Intervention	Information about breast cancer and its treatment	1 x 90 minutes	Increase knowledge about breast cancer
	The role of palliative volunteers in supporting the psychosocial needs of breast cancer patients	1 x 90 minutes	Increase knowledge and skill in understanding and supporting the psychosocial needs of breast cancer patients
	Principles of effective communication	1 x 90 minutes	Improve understanding of effective communication techniques with breast cancer patients when providing psychosocial support
	Role-playing effective communication interactions for providing psychosocial support	1 x 90 minutes	Improve skills regarding interacting with breast cancer patients to fulfil their psychosocial needs

Instrument and data collection

The research process began with licensing and obtaining ethical clearance. Data were collected offline using a Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) Instrument. The research team developed the independent variable in this study using the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and module of effective communication. We assessed the motivation of palliative volunteers using an adapted questionnaire from Clary, namely the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). This questionnaire consists of 30 question items that have been translated into Indonesian and modified to address the psychosocial needs of breast cancer patients. The questions in this questionnaire cover six functions consisting of value factors (5 items), understanding factors (5 items), social factors (5 items), career factors (5 items), protective factors (5 items), and enhancement factors (5 items). Seven answer options were available through a Likert scale for this questionnaire: a score of 1 indicated "not at all important" - a score of 7 indicated "very important." The adjustment questionnaire was translated by a professional translator who also validated the retranslation into English. The Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) score ranged from 30 to 210. A score could be categorized as low motivation (below 105) and high motivation (above 105) (Martins et al., 2024). In this study, the modified Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) questionnaire underwent a validity test on August 5, 2023. The questionnaire was tested on 10 health cadres in Batu City. The researchers used the Pearson Product Moment test with a 5% significance level, employing the SPSS Statistics 25 for Windows to analyze the questionnaire. The question is declared valid if the calculated r is greater than or equal to the r table value (0.632) with $\alpha = 0.05$. The validity test results on the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) questionnaire showed that there were no question items with $r \leq 0.632$. Therefore, this questionnaire was declared valid. Next, the reliability test results on the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) questionnaire obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.958. Thus, the questionnaire is considered reliable for use. After obtaining approval from the hospital, the researcher sought for the respondents' approval and willingness to participate as research subjects by distributing informed consent forms. The pre-test was conducted 1 hour before the first training session. Then, the training intervention was conducted over 4 weeks, and the post-test was administered in week 5.

Data analysis

All data were analyzed as continuous variables. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were computed to describe the respondents'

demographic data. The data analysis employed a dependent t-test because the data had a normal distribution, as determined by the Shapiro-Wilk test (p -value > 0.05).

Ethical considerations

This study was granted ethical clearance, with clearance number 7365/UN10.F17.10.4/TU/2023, by the Institutional Review Board at the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Health Sciences University of Brawijaya. The respondents were contacted based on predetermined criteria and provided with a clear explanation of the study's objectives. The researchers provided detailed explanations about the research, including its aims, procedures, potential discomfort, risks, benefits, and consequences of participating in the research. Then, the patient was given an informed consent letter to sign.

RESULT

Respondents' Characteristics

Table 2 shows that most respondents are in the 46- to 55-year age group (early older adults), with almost all respondents being women (95.5%). The majority have a junior or senior high school education (33.3%), and most palliative volunteers were housewives (46.6%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Respondents' Characteristics

Respondents' characteristics	Intervention group	
	Frequency	%
Age		
26-35 years	8	17.7
36-45 years	9	20.0
46-55 years	20	44.4
56-65 years	6	13.3
Over 65 years	2	4.44
Sex		
Men	2	4.44
Women	43	95.5
Education		
Elementary school	5	11.1
Junior high school	15	33.3
Senior high school	15	33.3
Diploma	4	8.88
Bachelor	6	13.3
Employment		
Housewife	21	46.6
Government employees	3	6.66
Self-employed	6	13.3
Others	15	33.3

Table 3. Description of respondents' motivation and its indicators before and after the effective communication training

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean $\pm$ Std deviation	Min-Max	Mean $\pm$ Std deviation	Min-Max
Protective factors	30.78 $\pm$ 4.856	22–35	32.03 $\pm$ 4.088	23–35
Value factors	30.67 $\pm$ 3.875	20–35	31.72 $\pm$ 4.242	21–35
Career factors	29.65 $\pm$ 3.876	16–34	30.97 $\pm$ 3.404	17–34
Social factors	26.98 $\pm$ 6.356	14–35	28.97 $\pm$ 6.650	15–35
Understanding factors	31.763 $\pm$ 3.765	22–35	34.20 $\pm$ 2.237	29–35
Enhancement factors	25.987 $\pm$ 5.872	9–33	26.80 $\pm$ 6.562	11–34
Motivation	164.76 $\pm$ 7.768	46–186	170.78 $\pm$ 7.987	50–204

Palliative volunteers' motivation to support the psychosocial needs of breast cancer patients

Table 3 exhibits the respondents' motivation and its variables before and after the effective communication training. The protective factor had the highest score pre-test (30.78), and its post-test score increased to 32.03. The variable with the lowest score is the enhancement factor, which obtained a pre-test score of 26.98 and a post-test score of 28.97. Meanwhile, the palliative volunteer motivation score before training is 164.76. This score increased after the training session to 170.78 (Table 3).

The difference in the palliative volunteers' motivation in providing psychosocial support before and after the training

The effect of effective communication training on the motivation of palliative volunteers in providing psychosocial support to breast cancer patients is evident in Table 4. The paired-sample t-test shows that the palliative volunteers' motivation increased significantly, with most respondents experiencing an increase in their scores from the pre-test to the post-test. The p-value (sig) result in the paired-sample t-test was 0.001, which is lower than $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted, indicating that the communication training affected the palliative volunteers' in providing psychosocial assistance for breast cancer patients in the Batu City area (Table 4).

Table 4. Difference in the palliative volunteers' motivation before and after the effective communication training

Motivation	Mean	Mean difference	t	P value
Pre test	164.7.6	3.8	5.123	0.001
Post test	170.78			

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of effective communication training on the motivation of palliative volunteers in providing psychosocial support to breast cancer patients in Batu City. The result showed that the effective communication training provided is effective in improving the motivation of palliative volunteers. All motivation indicators increased significantly. The understanding factor has the highest average result compared to other motivational functions. The understanding factor refers to those related to a person trying to acquire new knowledge through voluntary activities, such as learning new skills or gaining different perspectives (Tsai, Newstead, Lewis, & Chuah, 2023).

Communication training enhances the volunteers' capabilities to engage effectively with patients, thereby improving their interactions with breast cancer patients. A training session can have a positive impact on the volunteer's motivation, which can lead them to raise awareness of social problems, increase empathy, and increase their feeling of

satisfaction from helping people in need (Ogorodnikova, Plakhin, & Rostovtsev, 2021).

In this study, effective communication training was provided through lectures, discussions, and roleplay techniques. The results showed a significant increase in the palliative volunteers' motivation. This result aligns with research on palliative volunteers in Surabaya, which reported that communication training styles play a major role in the patient experience (Putra et al., 2022).

Caregivers can give thoughtful and supportive information to help patients develop coping strategies and focus their goals on achieving a comfortable and meaningful end-of-life period (Putra et al., 2022). Volunteering has become an increasingly important force in society, benefiting from both growing trends toward social consciousness and the desire for individual connection.

After the training session, the results show a significant increase in the motivation score of volunteers in providing psychosocial support to breast cancer patients. The training material provided ranged from information about breast cancer to role-playing activities related to communication techniques that consider empathy, care, and verbal and non-verbal expressions that can reinforce support for breast cancer patients (Bauer & Lim, 2019; Scott, Goossensen, Payne, & Pelttari, 2021).

Moreover, this study's results align with previous research that states effective communication should be based on the patient's underlying knowledge about their condition and should focus on addressing direct patient questions, denial, collusion, and anger. Therefore, interpersonal communication skills are considered core competencies in palliative care (Joshi, 2014).

Effective communication training techniques were shared with palliative volunteers through a lecture and role-playing activities. The role-play method improves the palliative volunteers' understanding better than just lectures for them to understand how to use verbal and non-verbal in their interactions with breast cancer patients. The role-playing activity also helped the volunteers to become more confident. This result aligns with other research that said 30% of volunteering training programs that consider the social, psychological, practical, and pedagogical aspects of volunteering are more effective for maintaining the volunteers' motivation (Engel et al., 2023; Ogorodnikova et al., 2021; Saptono, Soetjipto, Wahjoedi, & Wahyono, 2020). However, a limitation of this study is the absence of a control group, which restricts causal interpretation. Future studies should adopt a multi-site, randomized design to validate generalizability.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study shows that providing effective communication training can significantly increase the palliative volunteers' motivation to provide psychosocial support to breast cancer patients. Thus, nurses need to collaborate with palliative volunteers as part of an interdisciplinary team. The team can apply effective communication techniques, as well as listen and interact with empathy to understand the patient's psychological problems. This study's findings have practical implications for nurses as professional healthcare practitioners, suggesting that they coordinate and regularly provide communication skills workshops to sustain volunteer motivation and care quality as part of the palliative team.

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