

**POSTER SESSION 2 ABSTRACTS**  
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**Nurses' Attitudes, Perceptions, Practice, and Barriers toward Sexual Health Counseling  
in Individuals with Cancer**

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**Background:** Hematology/Oncology Marshfield Clinic, Weston WI

**Methods:** Exploratory cross sectional design. A confidential self administered 31-item postal questionnaire survey using attitudes, perceptions, practice and barriers toward sexual health counseling. A total of 39 responses were analyzed (69.6 % response rate).

**Findings:** All nurses surveyed (74.4% always and 25.6% usually) felt addressing sexual health concerns should be part of the care of individuals with cancer. Respondents replied provision of sexual health counseling was the responsibility of nurses (87%) and physicians (82%). Sixty nine percent of respondents reported feeling comfortable discussing sexual health concerns with patients. While only 36% of respondents reported having some form of educational training on sexual health, 40 % believed training would improve their knowledge and practice. Although 85% of respondents stated they would provide counseling if a patient raised a sexual concern, only 19% reported initiating discussion about sexual issues. Reported barriers to sexual health counseling include lack of expertise and training (71.8%), embarrassment (56.4%), and time constraint (43.6%). Respondents scored high on attitude score (mean  $41.6 \pm 3.9$ , 77.0% of maximum score), average on practice score (mean  $6.8 \pm 1.8$ , 56.7% of maximum score), and barrier score (mean  $27.7 \pm 6.7$ , 57.7% of maximum score). There was a significant positive correlation between the reported attitude and practice score for nurses ( $r = 0.55$ ,  $p = 0.0006$ ). Additionally, a significant correlation was demonstrated between nurses perceived lack of expertise and training and the total attitude, practice, and barrier score ( $r = -0.43$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ;  $r = -0.6952$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ; and  $r = 0.46$ ,  $p = 0.0078$  respectively). Demographic variables did not influence reported attitudes/perceptions, practice, or barrier scores.

**Conclusion:** Nurses surveyed felt it was appropriate to discuss sexual concerns with patients. Attitudes/perception scores were high. Over two thirds of respondents reported feeling comfortable discussing sexual needs with patients and agreed additional training would make them feel more comfortable. However, nurses who did not feel they had appropriate training had low practice scores. Identified barriers included lack of expertise or training, embarrassment, and time constraints. Further research investigating issues surrounding addressing and discussing patients' sexual concerns needs to be conducted.