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P448 -Benefits to the Nephrology MDT of Writing Outpatient Letters Directly to Patients

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Introduction

Effective sharing of information is essential for the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) to function well. Within the MDT, Specialist Nurses play a key role in shared decision making regarding renal replacement therapy, anaemia management and palliative or active supportive care. Nephrologists often communicate with, or refer patients to, Specialist Nurses, by sending them copies of outpatient clinic letters. Benefits to patients and Doctor's of writing clinic letters directly to patients have been reported and this practice has been endorsed by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. The benefits of writing directly to patients on the effectiveness of the MDT have not been previously examined.

Methods

We conducted an anonymised cross-sectional survey of 13 Specialist Nurses in our renal unit across six clinical domains (home haemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, anaemia management, pre-dialysis counselling, active supportive care and young adult care) to determine how Doctor's letters written directly to patients, rather than to GPs, affected their role. 12 Specialist Nurses responded in full.

Results

Specialist Nurses preferred to receive letters written directly to patients, for the following reasons:

Theme 1 – Patient Information: Eleven of twelve (92 %) nurses reported that letters written directly to the patient made it easier to determine what information had already been delivered to the patient, prior to their appointment with the nurse. "I now know that information directed at the patient level has already been delivered prior to the first meeting."

Theme 2 – Role of the Specialist Nurse: Ten of twelve (83 %) nurses thought that letters written directly to the patient made it easier to determine their exact role within the patient's management. "Patients often attend without us fully understanding why they have been referred, but if the patient is directly informed and we are copied in, our role is clear."

Theme 3 – Patient Relationship: Ten of twelve (83 %) nurses thought that letters written directly to the patient enhanced the patient-clinician relationship. "Patient feels part of the plan rather than on the periphery."

Theme 4 – Clinical efficiency: Five of twelve (42%) nurses thought that they made more effective use of time spent with patients who had received letters written directly to them. In particular, pre-dialysis counselling required less time reviewing and explaining Doctor's letters to patients. "Requires less time explaining last clinic letter to ensure patient understanding."

Conclusions

In summary, renal Specialist Nurses prefer Doctor's to write outpatient letters directly to patients. They identified benefits from this practice for both themselves and the patients.