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Challenges in nursing care for children with cancer: Report from Nigeria

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Background: Cancer is one the major causes of death in children and adolescents, accounting for about 4% of deaths in children below 5 years in Nigeria. The nursing care of these patients often does not receive adequate attention. This report highlights the challenges in nursing care of these children in a low resource setting and is aimed at raising awareness to influence advocacy and action.

Design/Methods: A retrospective review of 38 children treated for cancers in an inpatient children's ward over one-year period (November 2015 to November 2016). In the same period, a total of 992 children were admitted into the same ward. The nursing care of the patients has been reviewed.

Results: Children with cancers accounted for 3.8% of admissions on the ward. In addition to the nursing workload of these patients, several important challenges and limitations were encountered requiring attention and efforts of the nursing staff, including financial burden on parents and their inability to cope with costs, psychological issues involving parents and patients (aggression, anxiety, depression, withdrawal) and difficulties with communicable disease course, treatment and complications of treatment. These challenges significantly increase the nursing burden of the patients, which were often not part of patient treatment plan.

Conclusion: It is important to include these identified challenges in the counseling and treatment plan of children with cancers, particularly in low resource settings where the burden of nursing care is enormous. Development and implementation of a careful multidisciplinary care plan should help in addressing these challenges.

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