

Communication skills training beneficial for health care professionals working in cancer care

Clinical Question	How effective is communication skills training (CST) in changing behaviour for health care professionals (HCPs) working in cancer care and in improving HCP well-being, patient health status and satisfaction?
Bottom Line	CST for HCPs working in cancer care using learner-centred, experiential education methods by experienced facilitators improved some communication skills, particularly empathy, and helped HCPs to be less likely to give facts only without individualising their responses to the patient's emotions or offering support. Doctors and nurses did not perform differently for any HCP outcomes. There was no evidence to support a beneficial effect of CST on HCP 'burnout' nor with regard to patient mental or physical health and satisfaction, or patient perception of the HCPs' communication skills.
Caveat	It was not possible to determine whether the effects of CST were sustained over time, whether consolidation sessions were necessary, and which types of CST programs were most likely to work.
Context	People with cancer, their families and carers have a high prevalence of psychological stress, which may be minimised by effective communication and support from their attending HCPs. Research suggests communication skills do not reliably improve with experience, therefore, considerable effort is dedicated to CST programs.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Moore PM et al. Communication skills training for health care professionals working with people who have cancer. Cochrane Reviews, 2018, Issue 7. Art. No.: CD003751.DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD003751.pub4. This review contains 17 studies involving 1240 participants.

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD003751.pub4/full>