




## Supportive care for patients with gastrointestinal cancers


Pernilla Lagergren, PhD, RN  
Upper Gastrointestinal Research  
Department of Molecular Medicine and Surgery, KI



## Outline

- The situation for upper gastrointestinal cancer patients
- The situation of the hospital treatment
- The specialist nurse function
- The specialist nurse in the care pathway


---



## Upper gastrointestinal cancers

- Oesophageal
- Stomach
- Duodenum
- Liver
- Pancreas
- Gall bladder


---



## Upper gastrointestinal cancers cont.

- Demanding curative treatments
  - Extensive surgery
    - +/- neoadjuvant therapy
    - +/- adjuvant therapy
- Palliative treatments
- Poor prognosis


---



## Patients' situation before treatment

- Disease-related symptoms
- Emotional distress
- Comorbidities?
- Many questions
  - Disease
  - Diagnostic procedures
  - Treatment
  - Symptoms

---



## Patients' situation after treatment

- Short & long-term treatment-related symptoms
- Short & long-term poor quality of life
- Worries about the future
- Regular follow-ups

---



### Situation of hospital treatment

- Complex care pathways
  - Modern technology
  - New diagnostic tools
  - More treatment alternatives
  - Highly specialised care
  - Several disciplines involved
  - Centralisation
  - Research projects
- Physicians need relieved pressure



### One way to improve the supportive care of upper GI patients

#### SPECIALIST NURSE FUNCTION



### The specialist nurse

- Definition  
*A nurse with coordinating and supportive functions for the patients' during the entire care pathway with special interest and deep knowledge of the diseases and the patient groups*



### Functions of the specialist nurse

- Coordinative
- Supportive
- Continuity of the care



### Functions of the specialist nurse

- Coordinating functions
  - Diagnostic procedures
  - Treatments
  - Follow-up appointments
  - Collaborate with hospital departments involved in the care pathway
  - Collaborate with care givers outside hospital



### Functions of the specialist nurse cont.

- Supportive functions
  - Give support
  - Information
  - Early interventions
  - Courses?



### Functions of the specialist nurse cont.

- Continuity of the care
  - Follow the patient through the entire care pathway
  - Primary contact
  - Pager
  - Answering machine
  - Close to the nursing ward



### A care pathway

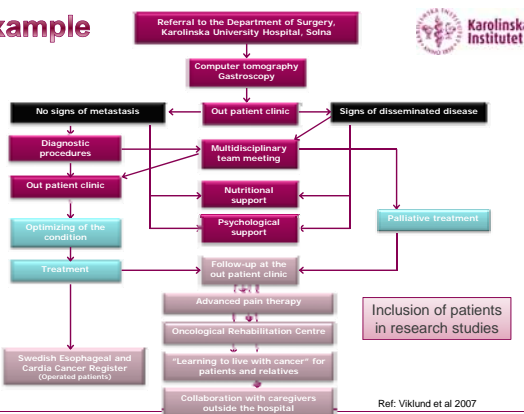
- From referral to end of follow-up



**THE SPECIALIST NURSE A KEY PERSON**

P. Lagergren

### Example



### The specialist nurse in the care pathway

- Diagnostic phase
  - Referral
  - Telephone contact
  - Additional diagnostic procedures
  - First appointment
  - Further diagnostic procedures
  - Contact with dietician/social worker etc
  - Multidisciplinary team meeting
  - Second appointment

### The specialist nurse in the care pathway cont.

- Treatment phase
  - Optimisation of condition
  - Plan and inform about treatments
  - Plan for hospitalisation
  - Visit the patient at the nursing ward



### The specialist nurse in the care pathway cont.

- Follow-up phase
  - Telephone contact 1 week after discharge
  - Plan regular appointments - years
  - Contact with the patients and their relatives when ever needed
    - Interventions given in a timely way
  - Contact care givers in and outside the hospital
  - Registration in quality registers





### Why specialist nurses?

- Patient in focus
  - Complex care pathways
    - To be coordinated
  - Appreciated function by the patients
  - Appreciated function by the health care professionals
  - No patient forgotten ("fall between two stools")
  - Health-economy?
  - Personally rewarding work
- 



### Several studies support specialist nurses

- Head & neck cancer (Wells et al 2009)
  - Upper gastrointestinal cancer (Viklund et al 2006)
  - Colorectal cancer (Campell et al 2001, Wright et al 2003)
  - Bladder cancer (Faithfull et al 2001)
  - Breast cancer (Koinberg et al 2004, Amir et al 2004, Halkett et al 2006)
  - Prostate cancer (Faithfull et al 2001, Boxhall et al 2003)
  - Lung cancer (Moore et al 2002, 2004)
  - Neurological cancer (Spetz et al 2005, 2008)
- 



### In the future

- Specialised education depending on the type of cancer
  - A specialist nurse contact for all cancer patients
- 



### Summary

- Patients with upper gastrointestinal cancer suffer from poor quality of life both before and after treatment
  - The care pathways are getting increasingly complex
  - A specialist nurse can facilitate the care pathways and improve the situation for the patients
- 



### Conclusion

- The specialist nurse as a key person in the care pathway of patients with upper gastrointestinal cancer can be recommended and should be further developed
- 

