‘The Function of The Multidisciplinary Team Meeting for Head And Neck Cancer: A Qualitative Analysis’

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Declaration

The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or programme.

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Abstract

Multidisciplinary team meetings (MDMs) have been shown to be beneficial in the management of patients with cancer. Government recommendations introduced in 2002 suggested that more meetings were needed to take place to optimize cancer care in the UK. Head and neck cancer is a typically heterogeneous disease, and the input of a multidisciplinary team was considered to be vital in order to manage patients properly.

This study was aimed at exploring the working of such MDMs through a series of interviews with healthcare professionals who regularly attended them. A large tertiary referral centre for head and neck cancer was the setting of the study. A total of 12 interviews were undertaken.

Themes emerged from the data suggesting that there were benefits and problems with the MDM. There were benefits to team working, communication, information gathering, patient care, planning and decision reassurance. The problems identified included time constraints, excessive radiological workload, cost implications and loss of nurse led meetings. There was little contribution by certain allied health professionals (AHPs) who found the atmosphere generated by medical staff combative. There was little time available to discuss non-medical issues. Patient care was not affected because social issues were discussed at a clinic following on from the MDM. Some Consultants questioned the ability of the MDM to come up with suitable treatment plans for patients, and preferred to make decisions in the clinic.

The study's findings could help improve the working of the MDM in head and neck cancer. The issues of non-contribution should be addressed as should time and financial resources. A different set up of the MDM may be beneficial or by having an addition MDM per week. Further studies are needed to fully explore these issues, and to implement changes to improve head and neck cancer services in the UK.