

FAMILY CONFERENCES

WHEN THE EVIDENCE CHALLENGES THE ASSUMPTIONS

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Question

Which type of common clinical encounter can be described as having the emotional depth and complexity which usually exceeds that of a typical business meeting?

Answer

“The Family Conference”
- a forum in which important health issues are identified, addressed and (hopefully) resolved by all participating parties.

A Family Conference



Background to the review

- ❖ **Family conferences are a well accepted means of communicating with families**
- ❖ **What available evidence was available which supported the utility and effectiveness of family conferences**

- Background to the review
- Clinical question
- Search strategies
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Quality of evidence
- Recommendations
- Future research
- Benefits/limitations of EBP for Social Work

PICO

- ❖ How well do family conferences in key clinical areas meet the needs of families?

Family: is defined broadly to include individuals with whom the patient feels connected by blood, legal or emotional ties (King, D., and Quill, T. 2006)

Family Conference: is a meeting which involves a number of family members the patient and hospital personnel in discussions concerning the patient's illness, treatment and plans for their discharge or their care outside the hospital. (Hansen, P., Cornish, P., and Kayser, K. 1998)

Search Strategies

Data bases searched

- CINHAL
- Medline
- PsycINFO
- Social Service Abstracts
- Psyc ARTICLES

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

- Qualitative and quantitative studies published from 1986 onwards
- Articles which complied with the definitions of the family and family conferences
- Family conferences that occurred in mental health settings or paediatric hospitals were excluded

Quality of evidence

- Wide range of evidence
- Level 111-1
- Unequivocal
- Credible

Recommendations

- ❖ Family Conferences should be included in all important settings – not just ICU, Palliative Care and Rehabilitation
- ❖ Guidelines should be developed to assist medical, nursing, other staff and families prepare for and appropriately lead/participate in family conferences
- ❖ Educators should consider the inclusion of training in courses to conduct family conferences for individual students/staff

Specific recommendations

- Develop a family conference guideline for social work staff to share with other members of the multidisciplinary team
- Develop a family conference guideline to assist families to better prepare for and participate in family meetings

Future Research

There is a paucity of Australian research into the utilization and effectiveness of family conferences in health settings. Clearly such a situation needs to be addressed.

Whilst there has been some limited overseas research conducted in intensive care and palliative care settings, the same could not be said for other medical and surgical settings.

Furthermore, the studies which had been undertaken did not address the needs of Indigenous patients/families or those from a non English speaking background.

Future Research

- Investigate the appropriateness/relevancy of family conferences for indigenous families/patients.
- Investigate the appropriateness/relevancy of family conferences for families/patients from non English speaking backgrounds.
- Undertake studies as to how well family conferences meet the needs of families in a wider range of medical and surgical settings.

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