CANCER CARE

Young people want honesty
Open communication with health professionals and better support for families are essential to young people with cancer

Young people with cancer want more honesty and better support from healthcare professionals. These are the findings of a study that covered more than 1,100 patients with cancer aged 13-24 from across the UK for three years after diagnosis.

The results of the five-year research project were discussed at the Teenagers and Young Adults with Cancer annual conference early last month.

Carried out by research group Brightlight and funded by the National Institute for Health Research, the project looked at the influences of who treats young people and where, the experiences of those caring for young people, and the experiences of young people with cancer nearing the end of life.

Listening

The study found that empowering young people is essential – they should have a key role in decisions regarding their treatment, and there should be open and honest communication between patients and healthcare professionals.

As cancer nurses, we know it is important that we listen to young people, but this report has shown just how pivotal that is to our work. If there is no chance of getting better they want to be told, so they have time to come to terms with their condition and can plan for a ‘good death’.

The study also found that for young people to receive expert care, we need to support those who care for them. Many parents will have to take time off work, juggle the lives of other family members and try to maintain a ‘normal’ family life.

‘If there is no chance of getting better, they want to be told’

As well as the financial implications, this can take a lot of emotional energy, and teams looking after teenagers and young adults with cancer must develop models of care to include this support.

But the issues highlighted by the study are not exclusive to this patient group, and the results can and should be shared beyond cancer services, and beyond services caring for children and young people.

Openness, honesty and transparency are traits that all healthcare professionals should possess, and ensuring families and carers have enough support is essential to the delivery of quality patient care. If we want to improve care for all our patients, we must apply these findings across the board.