I WORKED IN a thoracic unit before starting the conversion course to first level registered nurse. I have now completed the course and arranged an interview for the oncology department of a new hospital. The article on lung cancer could not have come at a better time for me and while reading through the article I was surprised at how much I knew, but had buried at the back of my brain. The article was informative and it inspired me to set myself some goals so that I could develop my knowledge and skills in this specialty.

Goals

My first goal is one that is fairly new to me, although I came across it frequently in the conversion course - health promotion. As a nurse I am aware of the benefits of promoting good health, but as a ‘teacher’ I have no skills in communicating the information to the client. For example, most people are aware of the dangers associated with smoking, as they are printed on the side of every cigarette packet. But smokers still need more information on the benefits of stopping, practical tips on how to stop and support throughout. I will contact some of the agencies that specialise in this and I have bought a book recommended to me by one of the tutors on the course. I will practise promoting stopping smoking on friends, family and colleagues who smoke and are willing to put up with me.

I would also like to expand my knowledge of other cancers – how tumours affect cells in different parts of the body, how the classification of lung tumours compares with tumours in other parts of the body and to find out about the success rates of surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. I think this would involve a lot of research and is too vast an area for me to undertake at the moment – it would have to be a long-term goal for the future.

My second goal will be to study and understand the significance of the investigations, as I would like to be able to read laboratory reports and to understand the significance of the findings. Familiarity with the normal ranges will enable me to identify abnormal readings at a glance.

The classification table in the article was easy to follow. Understanding this has been a problem for me in the past and I have tried to learn these classifications by heart. I intend to cut out the table and keep it in my notebook for a quick and easy reference guide. I will not feel under pressure to remember what a T2 or a N3 signifies, instead I will be able to refer to the table at a time convenient to the needs of the ward or the client.

I intend to undertake my third goal in two stages. Stage one will be to review the medical symptoms associated with the tumour and the symptoms associated with the treatment. Stage two of the goal will be to continue to develop myself professionally, so that I can deliver a high standard of care to clients in all aspects of their psychological and spiritual needs.

Aims and intended learning outcomes

The aims and intended learning outcomes of this article have been met. I can now discuss the pathophysiology of lung cancer. I understand the investigations and treatments that can be offered to the client. But I am not confident about discussing the options available that will help the client to make an informed decision about his or her care. I have decided to set myself another goal – I will accompany the consultant or senior staff when they are conveying this information. Previously, I would not have felt sufficiently confident to do this on my own, or have had the appropriate knowledge. This is the one area that I think the article did not touch on – imparting bad news to the client.

I am confident that if I am successful at the interview, I will continue to develop my skills in dealing with the symptoms of lung cancer and the side effects of the treatments in order to make the client and his or her family as comfortable and well informed as possible.

Gaining communication skills is a continual learning process. So that we can communicate effectively and answer the clients’ questions we, as nurses, must equip ourselves with the appropriate knowledge.

48 nursing standard october 6vol14no3/1999