

Hazardous cytotoxic drugs: How do nurses protect themselves during handling, administering and disposing of hazardous cytotoxic waste?

R J Charles, D Khalil and F Kajee

Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

Nurses working in Oncology and the Haematology clinical setting are exposed to hazardous cytotoxic drugs during administering and disposing of cytotoxic contaminated used instruments, and handling human cytotoxic waste of clients receiving chemotherapy. The appropriate use of personal protective equipment gear may reduce the occupational risk. The study will add new knowledge and insight about nurses' use of personal protective gear whilst they are administering, disposing of used instruments, and handling human cytotoxic waste. The qualitative and quantitative data sets were collected concurrently and the results were compared and synthesized to provide in an overview of the phenomenon. The study results raises awareness, of the challenges oncology nurses face whilst handling and disposing of cytotoxic waste material. The document reviews of PPE policy and practice guidelines provide a gap in policy. Purposive sampling was utilized to select 55 SANC-licensed nurses willing to participate and working in Oncology departments of two government hospitals in Cape Town. Methods of data collection included confidential questionnaires, interviews, and official documents reviews. Nurses portrayed confidence during the use of PPE. Glove use was high, but use of other personal protective equipment was very low. However, nurses had concerns regarding the negative effects of chemotherapy exposure. Most nurses were aware of dangers associated with cytotoxic drugs but had not been consistent in adhering to safe-handling and personal self-protection policies. The Oncology departments had been providing appropriate equipment but policies to enforce self-protection among nurses are urgently required. Regular monitoring of nurses health and in- service training would improve nurses' attitude towards self-protection.

Biography

R J Charles is pursuing her Master's at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). She completed her undergraduate nursing training at Groote Schuur Hospital in 1984 and completed Psychiatric Nurse training in 1987. In 1990, she was transferred to the Hematology clinic where she is still working as an operational manager and obtained her Oncology degree in 2010.

Rachel.Charles@westerncape.gov.za

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