Appetite, senses and joy of life – a nutrition project
Nielsen, Mette Mølgaard; Højer, Fie; Kristensen, Dorte Brinkmann

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A nutrition project

Introduction

This project aimed to generate knowledge about nutrition to the admitted child under treatment for leukaemia or brain cancer. The project was undertaken for the duration of 2011 in the paediatric oncology ward, at Aalborg University Hospital.

Background

It is our experience that children in chemotherapy often suffer from malnutrition and it is necessary for alternative nutrition methods including tube feeding and TPN (parenteral nutrition). This affects the child’s quality of life and observed that the children did not feel like eating the food from the hospital kitchen. When the child did have an appetite, the food was predominately brought in from outside of the hospital, either from home (family prepared) or takeaway food.

We realised that a greater effort was required to encourage the children to eat and the nursing staff needed to be more focused on nutrition.

It is well known, that the experience of eating food is an essential and basic human factor, which creates an increased quality of life. This experience contributes to a good life, where joy, satisfaction and social relations are formed around the meal. With the focus on natural senses we will attempt to create a complete meal experience for the child.

Purpose

With this project we hoped to change the admitted child’s opinion of food and create a positive and enjoyable experience. At the same time, we wanted to generate knowledge and create a framework for how meals would be coordinated for the children with cancer, in a hospital ward.

We aimed to treat the child as a “whole person” and attempt to let food and meals play the natural part in life as it should, and as a consequence, encourage the children to eat more and better. The results and experiences could be used in the future, for example in the creation of new children wards.

Method

The single points in the project were completed. The project group held regular meetings where new experiences, attitudes and knowledge was discussed and evaluated. With the regular meetings the new knowledge was quickly shared and there was the possibility to put into real practice with the cooperation of the participants in the project.

Completion and results

1) Interviews with the children and parents in regards to their requests, habits and needs

15 children diagnosed with leukaemia and brain cancer and their parents received a questionnaire and a follow up interview.

2) Different events conducted by the company Unisans

Fortightly there was a food workshop with our partners in the project. Unisans provided a chef and a sense coach. This gave a great atmosphere from the kitchen and spread happiness throughout the ward.

3) Rebuild of Kitchen and dining area

The kitchen still does not cater for the patient's special needs, seriously ill children. They do not have the energy or need for food. The medical reports have clearly in which phase of treatment children had the greatest weight loss and if the weight loss had long-term consequences. The evaluation can be used in the future as a foundation of comparison.

Conclusion

When we look back in perspective to the project and what it meant for the ward. One of the highlights was the medical reports have clearly in which phase of treatment children had the greatest weight loss and if the weight loss had long-term consequences. The evaluation can be used in the future as a foundation of comparison.

Discussion

There is still an issue regarding the parents to the seriously ill children. They do not have the energy or capacity to prepare food for the child. The hospital kitchen still does not cater for the patient's special wishes all day and night. The medical reports have not yet been calculated, but the success of the food project should not only be measured by how much the children eat, but also the joy and pleasure from eating, being together and living life.

Perspective

Cooking is now implemented as an activity every fourteenth day by the two play therapists. It is always associated with great joy, humor and of course togetherness. The menu is aimed to stimulate curiosity and togetherness. The menu is aimed to stimulate curiosity and togetherness. The menu is aimed to stimulate curiosity and togetherness. The menu is aimed to stimulate curiosity and togetherness.