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Evaluating patient's experience in liver transplantation: Role of the focus group technique

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Background and aims: Liver transplantation (LT) is the treatment of choice for patients with acute or chronic liver disease without other therapeutic alternatives. This is a common procedure in our environment and it is evaluated periodically using objective data. More recently, patients' feedback is also assessed to know the patients' subjective aspects (feelings, impressions, perceptions) of LT, and it is known as "the patient's experience". The aim of this study was to know the experiences in patients undergoing liver transplantation, and to identify improvement opportunities in this procedure.

Method: In order to know the experiences of the patients/relatives during the LT process, the technique of the focus group (FG) was applied. To prepare this group, the professionals involved in LT carried out the following activities: 1) a brainstorming session, applying the metaplan© technique, to gather the most relevant ideas and opinions about the process, 2) preparation of a document, based on the metaplan information, so that outside psychologist could moderate the FG; and 3) the selection of the participants in the FG: 4 caregivers and 8 transplanted patients. This group was held on 11/29/2016. Subsequently, the psychologist, who prepared a document with the information gathered from the FG, met with the transplant team to analyze the data and to identify possible improvement opportunities, which could be implemented in the daily work of the team.

Results: Transplant patients and their relatives considered the LT process well structured. They pointed out that the information about the process provided by the different professionals of the transplant team is unified, and refer a high degree of satisfaction with the staff. On the other hand, they emphasize the feeling of isolation in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and the lack of psychological support throughout all the process. Accordingly an intercom was used to enhance patient communication and visiting hours were more flexible. In addition, efforts are being made to incorporate a psychologist into the team, to help patients and relatives.

Conclusion: The FG has been an effective technique to identify important patient's subjective aspects in LT. That has allowed us to implement measures aimed at improving the patients' experience.