

2010, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched Healthy People 2020, an initiative that provides science-based national objectives for improving the health of all Americans. The purpose of this review is to emphasize the importance of CST, particularly in oncology patients, underlining the findings by Barth and Lannen Communication skills training is needed for health-care professionals, especially for those dealing with vulnerable populations such as oncology patients and with issues regarding palliative care and end of life. Communication skills training (CST) programs have been developed to improve both health-care providers' abilities and levels of confidence in effectively communicating with their patients (Kennedy Sheldon, 2005; Kiss & Sollner, 2006). Furthermore, effective communication translates to increased patient knowledge and shared understanding, increased adherence to treatment recommendations, and the adoption of healthier habits and self-care strategies (Epstein & Street, 2007). When a health-care provider demonstrates good communication skills, cancer patients are more apt to adhere to treatment recommendations and have improved psychosocial functioning (Arora, 2003). Further research assessing the effectiveness of CST in improving the communication of health-care professionals should focus on patient outcomes rather than health-care professionals' rating of their perceived abilities. The goals and objectives of Healthy People 2020 take into consideration the importance of effective communication between health-care providers and patients in improving patient outcomes (HHS, 2013). These may include validating and exploring emotional concerns and providing health information to decrease unfavorable emotions such as anxiety (Iwamitsu, Shimoda, Abe, Okawa, & Buck, 2005). In oncology settings, CST programs may help health-care professionals demonstrate feelings of empathy (Barth & Lannen, 2011). The literature has also linked CST to improved quality of medical care and improved patient satisfaction (Roter, 2006; Griffin et al., 2004). In 2011, Barth and Lannen published a systematic review assessing the efficacy of CST for health-care professionals. Back and colleagues reported positive results in using the Oncotalk program to train providers to develop effective communication skills when addressing difficult issues with patients (Back et al., 2007). Barth and Lannen (2011) state that continuous training throughout the course of a health-care professional's career may improve the communication skills acquired during clinical practice. Longitudinal studies that follow health-care professionals over time may be more beneficial in assessing the effectiveness and durability of CST and also may help meet the Healthy People 2020 goal. Effective communication between health-care professionals and patients generates information that is beneficial to patient outcomes and supports patient-centered care. Beginning at the time of diagnosis of cancer and continuing throughout treatment and survivorship, effective communication is vitally important to patient outcomes. Unfortunately, ineffective communication may increase levels of anxiety in patients and create uncertainty (Lamont & Christakis, 2001).