

The benefits of international immersion programs are multifactorial. These programs not only allow the sharing of nursing best practices and models of care and education, but they also increase collaborative opportunities to develop shared research ideas and innovation. This article presents the practicalities and considerations when undertaking an immersion program, with exemplars from the authors' experience and the unique and invaluable outcomes that were achieved.

#### AT A GLANCE

- Oncology nursing practice can vary across the world, with unique best practices across diverse care sites.
- Immersion programs can support the exchange of ideas and best practices to enhance oncology care globally.
- Formalized exchange or immersion programs provide a context for professional development in oncology nursing practice.

#### KEYWORDS

oncology nursing; professional development; exchange programs; education

#### DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/19.CJON.439-442

# International Exchange Programs

## Professional development and benefits to oncology nursing practice

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International immersion programs provide opportunities for nurses from different countries to exchange ideas about nursing practice, education, and research (Leinonen, 2006). The benefits of such immersion programs for student nurses have been widely reported (Kauffmann, Martin, Weaver, & Weaver, 1992; Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Thompson, Boore, & Deeny, 2000; Zorn, 1996) and include cognitive and professional development, personal maturation, and increased cultural understanding (Lee, Pang, Wong, & Chan, 2007). However, reports of immersion or funded travel programs for licensed nurses are rarely reported in the literature.

The Christie National Health Service Foundation Trust (the Christie) in Manchester, United Kingdom, is the largest single-site cancer center in Europe. In 2017, the Christie established the Education and Research Travel Bursaries, a funding source open to all healthcare providers for the purpose of international travel and professional oncology immersion experiences. The aim of these bursaries is to establish and develop partnerships, build on current experience, advance knowledge and skills, and share best practice across disciplines, care settings, and global organizations. The bursaries are available on an annual basis and equate to four awards of up to £5,000 (roughly \$6,340) for each application.

This article presents considerations for engaging in global oncology nursing immersion programs, with exemplars from the authors' engagement in such a program, including the benefits achieved by supporting collaborative oncology practice across care settings and countries.

#### Establishing Objectives

Establishing objectives to guide the immersion experience is an important first step to determining which countries and institutions to approach. At the Christie, bursary applicants are required to have clear aims and objectives, as well as a robust strategy for ensuring the success of the proposed immersion program. The application process is competitive, and applications undergo a comprehensive review by a panel of senior education and research staff members. Figure 1 provides examples of two applications, listing shared and distinct objectives. These objectives focused on the following two areas: the role of the advanced practice RN (APRN) in clinical trials, and the logistical and educational considerations to establishing an immune effector cell (IEC) program. Both applications shared an interest in the role of the APRN.

#### Funding

Lack of appropriate funding for immersion programs presents a significant