Oncology nurses, like all nurses in America, are aging along with a large percentage of the American public. Just as the baby-boomer generation reaches middle age, most actively practicing nurses are reaching the same milestone. Increased age also brings an increased risk for cancer (Schmidt-Luggen, 2000; Spratley, Johnson, Sochalski, Fritz, & Spencer, 2000). Many oncology nurses are cancer survivors (Picard, Agretelis, & DeMarco, 2004); therefore, the experience of treating a colleague is becoming more common. This article will describe the experience of members of a chemotherapy unit who administered chemotherapy to a colleague with breast cancer and worked alongside her on the days of her treatment. By relaying the experience, including its challenges and rewards, the authors hope to help other oncology nurses who most certainly will face a similar situation in the future.

Review of the Literature

Scant professional literature addressing the experiences of nurses who are cancer survivors is available; however, the Oncology Nursing Forum published a two-part article regarding professional and personal experiences with cancer. In Part I, DeMarco, Picard, and Agretelis (2004) discussed personal nursing experiences and how profession influenced survivorship. Using an interview process, the phenomenologic study delved into the lives of 25 RNs with cancer. DeMarco et al. concluded that nurses were more aware of the possibility of developing cancer because of their increased knowledge of medicine, but that understanding was not acknowledged in their care. Part II of the article was based on the same patient population as the first, but Picard et al. (2004) emphasized the professional effects of being a patient. The researchers noted that the healthcare community is responsible for investigating and responding to the needs of its colleagues. Several common themes were identified among the nurses: (a) Individualized support from colleagues allowed the nurses to balance work, life, and treatments and (b) healthcare professionals can advance