

The Role of Licensed Nursing Personnel in Radiation Oncology Part B: Integrating the Ambulatory Care Nursing Conceptual Framework

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Purpose/Objectives: To describe the professional opportunities for licensed nursing personnel in radiation oncology within the conceptual framework developed for ambulatory care nurses by the American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN).

Data Sources: Published articles and books.

Data Synthesis: Using AAACN's framework, the researchers identified three roles that are part of every ambulatory care nurse's practice and can be readily customized to radiation oncology: an organizational/systems role, a professional role, and a clinical nursing role. Incorporating the described framework into a radiation oncology nurse's job description can lead to maximizing the use of the professional staff member within the radiation oncology department. This level of professional utilization and validation of the radiation oncology nurse will lead not only to improved patient outcomes but also to greater professional satisfaction, resulting in improved retention.

Conclusions: The complexity of oncology therapies demands expert oncology nurses. This clearly is recognized in medical oncology, and patients with cancer who are being treated with radiation are no less important. To optimize patient care and therapeutic outcomes, the integration of nursing in all aspects of the radiation treatment continuum is essential.

Implications for Nursing: Radiation oncology nursing is an evolving subspecialty. Nurses can use the information in this article to evaluate their current roles and individual potential for further professional growth.

Key Points . . .

- ▶ To optimize patient care and therapeutic outcomes, the integration of nursing in all aspects of the radiation treatment continuum is essential.
- ▶ The American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing conceptual framework is a useful tool that can be applied to the role of professional radiation oncology nurses and help define specific roles and responsibilities.
- ▶ Within the framework, three specific roles can be identified: an organizational/systems role, a professional role, and a clinical nursing role.

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Advances in radiation therapy technologies, including imaging, treatment planning and administration, and new systemic radioprotective and radiosensitive agents, have allowed radiation oncologists to expand treatment options for patients with cancer, resulting in more patients receiving therapy with curative intent. As a result, the role of the RN has evolved from that of clinical assistant to one of clinical expert in the evaluation and management of patients receiving radiation therapy. This evolution has been slow, and many nurses continue to provide "clinic care" and clerical assistance despite the opportunity and need to provide expert patient care. This article will explore the opportunities available for RNs in radiation oncology within the conceptual