Building the ONS Foundation One Donor at a Time

I am not sure there is ever a good time to talk to people about giving money to a cause, but there are probably times that are worse than others. Today’s economic climate makes the act of donating our hard-earned money a substantial challenge. As nurses, we do not typically have large amounts of unfettered income. For most of us, even those in two-income families, paychecks are divided quickly into all the little “pots” that make up our lives: the mortgage pot, the grocery pot, the car pot, the utilities pot. There are months when the number of pots seems overwhelming and the money to fill them runs out before I get to the last one. Those of us with anything leftover usually need to squirrel the money away into whatever serves as our savings pot for a well-deserved vacation, our children’s college fund, long-term care for a beloved parent, or the proverbial rainy day.

Everywhere you turn hands are outstretched for donations. We are asked to give a dollar for some cause or another at the grocery checkout. At church on Sunday, a missionary reminds us that we really do not have it so bad after all and begs for help with his faraway congregation. Nifty address labels with our names preprinted on them arrive in our mailbox unsolicited and accompanied by a request for funds to support some sort of charitable cause. We begin to feel like we are trying to empty an ocean of misery with a tablespoon.

With all this in mind, you might think me crazy to ask you to consider donating to one more worthy endeavor, but I will nevertheless. I want you all to take a minute to consider oncology nursing’s own, very special, outstretched hand, the ONS Foundation. What sets the ONS Foundation’s hand apart from the others is that, as oncology nurses, we get back what we give. Actually, I prefer to think that supporting the ONS Foundation is more of an investment than a donation. The payback comes in the form of scholarships, educational programs, research grants, and other types of support intended to help the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) achieve its mission and goals. In principle, every ONS member has access to these funds. Even though only a small proportion of our members apply for a scholarship or are nominated for an award, we all benefit by the good that comes to the profession from nurses who further their education, find the resources to attend Congress, or enlighten us with a special presentation. Our evidence base for practice is supported with each completed research project, and the structure that was created by the ONS Foundation—the Center for Leadership, Information and Research—provides funding for symptom management research and education, outcomes research, and leadership development and demonstrates the value of oncology nurses in the care of patients with cancer. These benefit each of us and ultimately our patients.

A very successful capital campaign in recent years added millions of dollars to the ONS Foundation’s coffers. This campaign was as successful as it was, in part, because the ONS Foundation was able to demonstrate that it enjoyed the financial support of individual members. I have heard some say that the size of the corporate contributions to the capital campaign makes individual member donations unnecessary and inconsequential. Nothing could be further from the truth. We must continue our support and increase our pledges when possible. Our ability to dig a little deeper and pledge even a small amount to the ONS Foundation every year will ensure the continued viability of programs that benefit each of us. A small amount given regularly accumulates quickly, and everyone who gives is entitled to take credit for the work done by the ONS Foundation with those funds.

Even if you think you will never take advantage of a scholarship, the nurse who does will bring the effects of that education back to his or her practice and may be the next person to present the best program you ever attended at Congress. The nurse who receives a doctoral scholarship may conduct the research that helps you solve that troubling patient care problem. A nurse leader at your facility who shares with you the skills learned at the Leadership Development Institute might give you the mentoring you need to advance. The idea that you, as an individual, can experience a direct benefit from the ONS Foundation’s efforts is not at all far fetched.

If you want those opportunities and benefits to be there when you are ready to take advantage of them, consider making sure that the ONS Foundation is able to prosper by offering your financial support. The contribution can be a one-time amount or you can give an amount divided up over time. When you are stumped over what to buy the person who has everything, give a donation in his or her honor. The ONS Foundation is an excellent place to make a donation in someone’s memory in lieu of flowers. Buy raffle tickets for Congress or the Institutes of Learning, even if you are unable to attend. Urge your local chapter to make regular contributions using the various opportunities offered specifically to chapters. There are many ways to give and just as many ways to recover your investment. With every donation, just remind yourself that you and your oncology nurse colleagues are worth every penny.

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Editor