The Role of Oncology Nurses in Discussing Clinical Trials

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Cancer clinical trials (CTs) reveal new ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat patients with cancer, and provide effective supportive interventions for patients and their families. In addition, studies of new treatment regimens can provide participants with early access to promising interventions. Although CTs provide the evidence base for clinical practice, less than 10% of patients with cancer participate in them (Al-Refaie et al., 2011; Institute of Medicine, 2010; Murthy, Krumholz, & Gross, 2004; Unger et al., 2013). Various reasons explain why enrollment in trials is so low, but a common reason is because patients do not know the studies were an option for them (American Cancer Society, 2016). In addition, a variety of patient knowledge gaps and attitudes exist, including concerns about risks that may impede participation (Manne et al., 2015; Meropol et al., 2007, 2016).

A National Cancer Institute and American Society of Clinical Oncology symposium that focused on CT accrual revealed that improving provider communication with patients was an effective way of increasing patient participation.