A
lthough the medical field has progressed significantly in detecting and treating cancer, more work needs to be done. Oncology nurses play a vital role in cancer prevention, detection, and treatment. Their responsibilities include working directly with the patients and providing documentation in patient records. In past years, documentation may not have been considered a very important part of a nurse’s job. Today, what a nurse writes on a medical record or types into the computer in regard to the patient’s care is important to more than just the patient.

Oncology nurses in the healthcare system, which is becoming more sophisticated, are not only concerned that patients receive proper care but also have to consider liability resulting from improper documentation. The number of negligence and malpractice lawsuits that name nurses as defendants because of their failure to adequately document patient care has increased in recent years. Nurses are under a great deal of scrutiny, regardless of the healthcare setting. For example, in the clinical trials setting, where documentation is critical to the evaluation of the experimental treatment, a greater emphasis is placed on correct documentation procedures and the increased role of risk managers as a result of litigation concerns.

The work of the oncology nurse, whether in the hospital, home, or clinical trials setting, involves a great deal of documentation, such as charting the patient’s history, physical changes, medications, treatments, chemotherapy administration, side effects, complications, family concerns, and telephone conversations. The demand for oncology nurses involved in these activities can leave a paper trail that would take others months, or even years, to follow and understand. Nurses need to understand the laws as they apply to documentation and be familiar with the issues that have a substantial impact on their nursing role.

Adding the increased use of and reliance on technology in the nursing setting complicates matters even further because liability can result from the nurse’s improper documentation when using these new technologies. Changing technology is stretching the parameters of documentation and the concerns related to adequately documenting care. Fortunately, oncology nurses can do several things to ensure effective patient care and proper documentation.

This article discusses the various methods and forms of documentation used by nurses and provides guidelines for the proper documentation of a patient’s chart. Reasons why some nurses do not adequately document care also are discussed. The article focuses specifically on the widespread use of emerging technology and its impact on patient charting and...