

# The Oncology Nursing Specialty

**T**he oncology nursing specialty seeks to reduce the risks, incidence, and burden of cancer by encouraging healthy lifestyles, promoting early detection, improving the management of cancer symptoms and side effects throughout the disease trajectory, and leading the coordination of complex care needs.

Oncology nurses are leaders in ensuring access to and providing quality cancer care. Oncology nurses advocate for people at risk for or with a diagnosis of cancer, deliver education throughout treatment decision making and planning with attention to individual health literacy levels, coordinate care delivery across the cancer continuum, ensure safe delivery of cancer treatments, assess for complications of therapy, help manage symptoms, optimize quality of life, support patients with cancer and their caregivers, advocate for the unique needs of patients with cancer, and collaborate with an interprofessional team to improve outcomes and reduce the impact of cancer on patients, families, communities, and populations.

Oncology nurses generate, implement, and educate patients and healthcare professionals on the science of cancer therapies, particularly as medical, radiation, cellular, and surgical options evolve to prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer. New cancer treatments have transformed the cancer care landscape and nursing's role in supporting patients receiving multimodality treatment regimens. To ensure patient safety and broaden knowledge and understanding of these novel treatments, oncology nurses need to be equipped with the latest information to successfully guide their patients through the cancer journey.

This position statement supports the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) publication *Oncology Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice* (Lubejko & Wilson, 2019), which provides a framework for the appropriate and expected scope of oncology nursing practice across settings, levels of practice, and roles.

## It is the position of ONS that

- Oncology nurses are integral members of the interprofessional healthcare team and liaise with other disciplines, complementary care teams, and adjacent industries (e.g., technology), as well as collaborate with payers and others across the care continuum.
- Oncology nurses ensure optimal patient outcomes when they are employed in clinical, administrative, education, and research roles across the care continuum, including disease prevention, control, treatment or palliation, survivorship, and end-of-life care.
- Oncology nurses translate, interpret, and explain cancer care options to patients and caregivers while supporting them in making treatment decisions based on personal goals and relevant data.
- Oncology nurses provide a holistic approach to care, consistent with the foundation for nursing education in prelicensure and advanced degrees, caring for the entire patient, and intervening for optimal quality of life and patient outcomes, with attention paid to the cultural, ethical, and spiritual preferences of their patients.
- Nurses receive appropriate training, beginning in nursing school with the incorporation of oncology content as outlined in the publication *ONS Essential Competencies and Curriculum for Undergraduate/Pre-Licensure Nursing Programs* (ONS, 2018).
- At minimum, oncology nursing professionals validate their own competencies based on competencies ONS has defined for oncology RNs, graduate level-prepared RNs, advanced practice RNs (APRNs), clinical trials nurses, nursing leaders, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, and nurse navigators.
- Oncology nurses participate in ongoing professional development, work toward certification upon hire, and maintain certification once obtained.
- Oncology nurses participate in the curation, capture, and synthesis of pertinent health data into technology platforms.
- Oncology nurses advocate for health policy efforts that affect the work environment and the continuum of care for patients. The voice and insight of

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oncology nurses are critical in conversations with policymakers and regulatory agencies.

- Additional federal funding is provided to ensure that U.S. nursing schools can recruit and retain adequate faculty and to support research grants to assess model programs that most efficiently use all healthcare professionals' skills and evaluate nursing contributions to health care in general and cancer care specifically.

Approved by the ONS Board of Directors, January 2020.

#### REFERENCES

- Lubejko, B.G., & Wilson, B.J. (Eds.). (2019). *Oncology nursing: Scope and standards of practice*. Oncology Nursing Society.
- Oncology Nursing Society. (2018). *ONS essential competencies and curriculum for undergraduate/pre-licensure nursing programs*. <http://bit.ly/2GZ4Byt>