Preparing Oncology Advanced Practice RNs as Generalists in Palliative Care

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OBJECTIVES: To train and support oncology advanced practice RNs (APRNs) to become generalist providers of palliative care.

SAMPLE & SETTING: APRNs with master’s or doctor of nursing practice degrees and at least five years of experience in oncology (N = 165) attended a National Cancer Institute–funded national training course and participated in ongoing support and education.

METHODS & VARIABLES: Course participants completed a precourse, postcourse, and six-month follow-up evaluation regarding palliative care practices in their settings, course evaluation, and their perceived effectiveness in applying course content in their practice.

RESULTS: The precourse results showed deficiencies in current practice, with a low percentage of patients having palliative care as part of their oncology care. Barriers included lack of triggers that could assist in identifying patients who could benefit from palliative care. Six-month postcourse data showed more APRNs participating in family meetings, recommending palliative care consultations, speaking with family members regarding bereavement services, and preparing clinical staff for impending patient deaths.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: APRNs require palliative care training to integrate this care within their role. APRNs can influence practice change and improve care for patients in their settings.

KEYWORDS palliative care; advanced practice RNs; advanced cancer

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