

# Professional Development for Oncology Nurses: A Commitment to Lifelong Learning

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Think back to the day you graduated from your entry-level nursing program. The feelings we experienced at that time are likely universal, whether that day was one year ago or more than 40 years ago. No more tests, no more papers, no more clinical skills practice, and no more preparing the dreaded nursing care plan. School was finished. We all looked forward to passing our nursing boards and getting our first real nursing jobs. Certainly, we all had some vague idea that during our life as nurses we would, at some time, have to learn a new skill, or work with a new type of equipment; however, many of us did not seriously contemplate or acknowledge that we were embarking on a career path that expected us to be lifelong learners. Little did we know that engaging in the process of lifelong learning is not necessarily something that comes naturally; it is, in fact, a personal commitment that each of us makes to the pursuit of learning throughout our professional career.

In 2012, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) published a position paper on lifelong learning for oncology nurses in the *Oncology Nursing Forum (ONF)* (ONS, 2012). Embracing the Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2010) report, ONS (2012) stated that nurses must engage in “continuous professional development, advanced nursing education, and the development of interprofessional models of care” (p. 127). ONS recognized that although the basic principles of oncology nursing remain unchanged, new and improved trends in models of care delivery, the rapidly changing science and technology of cancer care, and published data from nursing research and clinical trials created knowledge domains, which demanded that oncology nurses remain current to provide quality patient

care (ONS, 2012). At that time, ONS also called for collaboration among various groups engaged in the training of nurses and the provision of health care to ensure that lifelong learning was encouraged and the ongoing needs of the nursing work force were met.

The idea of lifelong learning is something all professional nurses must embrace to lead change and improve health (IOM, 2010). The ONS position paper determined 12 behaviors that oncology nurses should demonstrate to meet the professional expectations of a lifelong learner (see Figure 1). The challenge is to identify opportunities as well as develop and implement methods or strategies aimed at supporting oncology nurses in the pursuit of meeting those expectations.

## Journal Club

Journal clubs have been in use since 1875 and have served multiple purposes over the years (Duffy, Thompson, Hobbs, Niemeyer-Hackett, & Elpers, 2011). The journal club format can help educate students, support staff nurse skill development, promote evidence-based practice and interprofessional collaboration, and introduce staff nurses to the exciting world of nursing research. Journal clubs have become a well-recognized and established method used to foster and support the excitement of lifelong learning. Journal clubs are an effective way to share current subject matter knowledge with nurses, and also provide a platform to help nurses evaluate the value of this knowledge and its potential application to their clinical setting (Duffy et al., 2011).

When well organized, a successful journal club has a dedicated leader and is focused on current, relevant nursing issues (Duffy et al., 2011). At the University

of Arizona Medical Center–University Campus, the clinical nurse specialist (CNS) on the gynecologic oncology surgical unit has organized and led a highly active interprofessional journal club for several years. The CNS selects several related nursing articles on a pre-selected topic each month and provides them to the unit staff in advance of the journal club meeting. Topics selected for discussion often are related to quality measures or outcomes monitored on the unit or on evidence-based practice (EBP) relevant to the unit’s patient population. Monthly meetings are facilitated by the CNS and attendees are encouraged to freely discuss the article content, question methods used in the research or EBP to gain understanding of the strength of the evidence presented, and evaluate the results for relevance and application to the nursing care on their unit. The atmosphere is relaxed and participants are comfortable in this environment where learning is encouraged and supported.

Articles for discussion are selected from many relevant sources. *ONF* highlights one research article in each publication that is appropriate for use in journal club discussion. The emphasis is on evaluating relevant nursing research and translating the findings to clinical practice, education, or administration. Questions are suggested that can be used to initiate the discussion, and permission to photocopy the article for use also is provided. Another source available for use is the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing (CJON)*. *CJON* focuses on providing information to practicing oncology nurses promoting quality care for patients with cancer and families across the care continuum. Each issue of *CJON* offers a dedicated journal club article that focuses on a timely, relevant topic in cancer nursing.