As the pace of nursing care accelerates, staffing levels reflect the diminishing RN workforce, and the United States’ nursing shortage looms on the horizon, helping oncology nurses cope effectively with their challenging work environment emerges as an organizational imperative.

Oncology nursing offers not only personal fulfillment and intellectual stimulation, but it also is intensely demanding, both physically and emotionally. Recognizing the challenges inherent in oncology nursing, particularly in the inpatient environment, and guiding nurses to meet them efficiently and effectively while caring for themselves are essential to any successful oncology program.

The diversity of career options, more lucrative compensation, and flexible work schedules have contributed to a much smaller pool of potential nursing students. The lure of nursing opportunities outside the hospital setting, in turn, has spread the available nursing workforce across a multitude of work settings. As fewer RNs are educated, the number of nurses who choose to enter oncology nursing also may decrease. In one survey, oncology nurses, oncologists, and nurse executives overwhelmingly perceived that far too few RNs with an oncology specialty are available for practice and predicted to practice in the future (Buerhaus, Donelan, DesRoches, Lamkin, & Mallory, 2001). This situation is likely to be exacerbated as fewer students enter the profession. A sense of urgency about the retention of RNs becomes even more crucial as a cadre of seasoned nurses approaches retirement age.

The need to value and treasure oncology nurses has never been greater than it is today.

Valuing Oncology Nurses

Appreciating oncology nurses as a cherished resource in the healthcare setting mandates a comprehensive approach to...