

# LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Associate Editor

## Support for Frontline Oncology Nurses' and Administrators' Scholarly Activities

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The integral value of formal professional development and continuing education programs for nurses is indisputable. As indispensable members of the healthcare team, professional nurses in all practice roles and settings must be committed to lifelong learning to provide the highest quality of care to their patients. Despite the countless challenges that arise in dynamic healthcare settings, nurses are compelled to take advantage of emerging and existing learning opportunities to ensure that they incorporate creativity, innovation, and knowledge into practice.

Mentorship is characterized by the exchange of ideas and a dedication to professional growth of colleagues in the workplace. Tourigny and Pulich (2005) suggested that mentoring is an effective method to build nursing knowledge and expertise. In contrast to formal mentorship initiatives that specifically define the parameters, expectations, and goals of mentoring relationships, Tourigny and Pulich proposed that informal mentoring is more collaborative and allows nurses the latitude to self-select the activities that resonate with their individual professional and knowledge development needs.

Riley, Beal, Levi, and McCausland (2002) challenged the traditional notion that scholarly activity resides uniquely in academic

settings and asserted that the pursuit of scholarship is not the exclusive domain of nursing faculty. Rather, the generation and cultivation of inquiry and the development of knowledge must be integrated into all clinical nursing practice roles and settings. Those elements are critical to the advancement of nursing as a practice discipline and validate the application of knowledge acquired in practice. Scholarly nursing practice thrives in a milieu where nurses are motivated and supported by colleagues who promote critical thinking, informed decision making, and the continuous evaluation of patient care processes and systems (Byrne & Keefe, 2002). Nurses in all areas of practice acknowledge that mentoring has optimized the professional competency of their colleagues.

These concepts provided the framework that was used to establish the Scholarly Activities Working Group (Working Group) at the authors' organization. The Working Group provided an interactive forum that facilitated scholarship among oncology nurses in all practice roles and settings in the organization. The Working Group fostered collaboration between direct-care nurses and their interdisciplinary colleagues. In addition, it provided numerous opportunities for interactive feedback and role modeling and

bolstered the recognition of and placed value on scholarly activities. This article describes how the need for the Working Group was identified, how it subsequently was implemented, and how it continues to evolve as a successful model for informal mentoring and support.

### Background

At Dana-Farber Cancer Institute (DFCI), nurse leaders, scientists, and educators long have recognized that the dynamic relationship between knowledge attainment and its application to practice is fundamental to professional competency. The establishment of the Phyllis F. Cantor Center for Research in Nursing and Patient Care Services at DFCI in May 2001 emphasized nursing as a practice-based discipline firmly rooted in science and the nursing process. However, a gap analysis revealed that although staff nurses at DFCI valued research and scholarship, few were actively involved in such activities. When the results of the gap analysis were discussed at an open forum, several other facts became clear. Despite having an outstanding commitment to excellence in patient care, nurses who attended the forum displayed only rudimentary knowledge of the research process, had not presented at professional

### Leadership & Professional Development

This feature provides a platform for oncology nurses to illustrate the many ways that leadership may be realized and professional practice may transform cancer care. Possible submissions include but are not limited to overviews of projects, interviews with nurse leaders, and accounts of the application of leadership principles or theories to practice. Descriptions of activities, projects, or action

plans that are ongoing or completed are welcome. Manuscripts should clearly link the content to the impact on cancer care. Manuscripts should be six to eight double-spaced pages, exclusive of references and tables, and accompanied by a cover letter requesting consideration for this feature. For more information, contact Associate Editor Paula Klemm, DNSc, RN, OCN®, at klemmpa@udel.edu.

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