

Oncology Nurse Practitioner Role

Recommendations from the Oncology Nursing Society's Nurse Practitioner Summit

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BACKGROUND: Oncology nurse practitioners (ONPs) are advanced practice RNs prepared at the graduate level with high-level knowledge and skills in oncology. Because of challenges in educational programs and variability in the scope of practice at the state and institutional level, many ONPs are challenged to practice to the full extent of their education, certification, and licensure.

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this article is to review issues affecting the education and practice patterns of ONPs and to identify solutions to address the challenges that exist for ONPs.

METHODS: Members of the Oncology Nursing Society's Nurse Practitioner Summit summarized the challenges faced by ONPs related to education, training, practice, and professional development.

FINDINGS: Efforts to promote ONP practice at the fullest extent of licensure and across various settings should be prioritized. Resources must be devoted to education, onboarding, and retention to integrate and retain ONPs as leaders of the interprofessional team.

KEYWORDS

oncology nurse practitioners; scope of practice; professional development

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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ONCOLOGY NURSE PRACTITIONERS (ONPs) are advanced practice RNs (APRNs) prepared at the graduate level with high-level knowledge and skills within the specialty of oncology. This preparation enables ONPs to provide expert care for patients across the cancer care continuum. Based on state regulatory requirements, ONPs deliver a comprehensive range of healthcare services, such as compiling health histories, performing physical examinations, ordering and interpreting diagnostic studies, diagnosing and treating acute and chronic medical conditions, managing symptoms related to cancer treatments, and prescribing pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic therapies (i.e., chemotherapy, narcotics, counseling, education, and patient support) (American Association of Nurse Practitioners [AANP], 2018a; Brant & Wickham, 2013). ONPs actively collaborate with other members of the interprofessional team to ensure the delivery of quality care for patients with cancer and their caregivers.

The scope of practice for ONPs is regulated by the nursing practice acts defined by the laws and regulations of each individual state. In some states, ONPs have full practice authority, which allows them to practice independently without supervision by physicians, whereas in other states, ONPs have limited practice authority. To date, 22 states and the District of Columbia allow full, autonomous practice for ONPs (AANP, 2018b) (see Figure 1). Legislative efforts are ongoing across the nation with the intent to increase the number of states allowing full ONP practice authority.

Oncology Nurse Practitioner Training and Education

The Institute of Medicine ([IOM], 2011) report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* outlined the role of nurses in a complex healthcare delivery system. Four essential messages were identified: (a) Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training; (b) nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved educational system that promotes academic progression; (c) nurses should be full partners with physicians and other healthcare professionals in redesigning healthcare in the United States; and (d) effective workforce planning and policymaking require better data collection and information infrastructure.