



Oncology Nursing Society

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Health Policy Agenda 110th Congress, 1st Session

The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), the world's largest oncology membership association – composed of more than 35,000 nurses and other healthcare professionals – exists to promote excellence in oncology nursing and to ensure the provision of quality care to individuals affected by cancer.

Each year in the United States, approximately 1.4 million people are diagnosed with cancer, another 565,000 die from this terrible disease, and more than eight million Americans count themselves among the growing community of cancer survivors. Cancer has become the nation's leading cause of death; at the same time, our nation is facing an unprecedented nursing shortage of crisis proportion.

As part of its mission, ONS honors and maintains nursing's historical and essential commitment to advocacy for the public good. To that end, ONS works collaboratively with policymakers, cancer and nursing community advocates, and other stakeholders at the local, state, federal, and international levels to advance legislative, regulatory, and programmatic efforts that will reduce and prevent suffering from cancer. As part of this effort, ONS seeks the integration of nurses and the nursing perspective throughout the policymaking process and urges that oncology nurses be appointed to all relevant federal panels, committees, commissions, and boards.

ONS respectfully calls on the U.S. Congress and the White House to: (1) bolster the nation's nursing workforce to safeguard public health, (2) advance and ensure access to quality, comprehensive cancer care, and (3) promote and prioritize tobacco cessation.

Bolster the Nation's Nursing Workforce to Safeguard Public Health

ONS believes the best outcomes in oncology practice are achieved through a highly-educated, well-trained, experienced nursing workforce. As such, ONS urges Congress to:

- Provide \$200 million in FY 2008 to the Nurse Reinvestment Act and other Health Resources and Services Administration nursing workforce programs and \$150 million to the National Institute of Nursing Research to ensure the nation has an adequate supply of oncology nurses to provide quality care and conduct cancer research;
- Expand and prioritize funding for – and promote through authorizing legislation – programs that encourage nurses to become and serve as faculty;
- Recognize the essential contributions made by oncology nurses by increasing Medicare reimbursement – and ensuring coverage – for the full range of inpatient and outpatient oncology nursing services (e.g. chemotherapy teaching), including those provided by advanced practice nurses;
- Ensure the Medicare database captures specialty-specific advanced practice data and that oncology nurses can participate in Medicare pay-for-performance and demonstration programs; and

- Preserve and promote oncology nurses' scope of practice at the state and federal levels.

Advance and Ensure Access to Quality, Comprehensive Cancer Care

Approximately two-thirds of cancer cases are preventable through lifestyle/behavioral factors and improved practice of cancer screening. As such, if the healthcare community is to continue to make gains in cancer survival rates and further reduce cancer-related morbidity, people must be ensured access to the full range of oncology-related care. To that end, ONS urges Congress to:

- Provide \$32.83 billion in FY 2008 to the National Institutes of Health (NIH); a minimum \$5.5 billion to the National Cancer Institute, and \$200 million to the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities and appropriate new funding to support oncology nurse-scientists;
- Allocate \$427.5 million in FY 2008 to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support and expand its screening, education, early detection, and prevention programs;
- Enact legislation to ensure that every American has access to meaningful, comprehensive, and continuous health insurance coverage, irrespective of health history and/or pre-existing conditions, and ensure that all individuals have affordable access to prescription drugs, cancer screening, early detection, and risk reduction strategies and therapies (e.g. chemoprevention) appropriate for them based on their health history, age, and other risk factors;
- Ensure that individual or family health history or genetic information cannot be employed in a discriminatory way or otherwise misused by health plans, insurers, and employers; and
- Increase Medicare reimbursement for all components of cancer treatment, follow-up, supportive, and end-of-life care and direct the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission to study and recommend new payment methodologies that result in reimbursement rates which cover the full cost and complete range of outpatient cancer nursing care and services.

Promote and Prioritize Tobacco Cessation

Tobacco – the nation's leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death – annually is responsible for 30 percent of cancer deaths and \$167 billion in health care expenditures and productivity losses. Therefore, ONS urges Congress to:

- Grant meaningful and comprehensive authority to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to regulate all tobacco products;
- Ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – the international treaty process initiated by the World Health Organization – to ensure a strong global response to the tobacco epidemic; and
- Ensure that all individuals have affordable access to the full range of proven-effective tobacco cessation strategies and therapies.

ONS Board of Directors approved January 2007.

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