

Searching for the Heart of Oncology Nursing

It never fails. Whenever a group of oncology nurses gathers, we start telling stories about the patients and families we cared for and the lessons we learned from them (HIPAA notwithstanding). I think back vividly to the people who taught me early on how to be an oncology nurse—the patients with cancer who generously imparted their wisdom to me. I learned how important quality (not just quantity) of life is and how essential managing symptoms is. I learned how important it was to sit with my patients and listen to them. One young woman told me, “I expect my doctor to cure my cancer—or do the best he can to do that. But if I can’t sleep or haven’t had a bowel movement in days . . . my life can be pretty miserable.” We all can tell stories from the lessons we have learned on the frontlines delivering cancer care. What are the lessons you have learned about delivering cancer care and about being an oncology nurse? How has working with patients with cancer and their families affected you and how you live your life?

“Storytelling is the ancient art of conveying events in words, images, and sounds often by improvisation or embellishment. Stories have probably been

shared in every culture and in every land as a means of entertainment, education, preservation of culture, and to instill knowledge and values/morals” (Wikipedia, 2008). We use storytelling for all of those reasons. Stories help us express meaning in the work that we do and impart the wisdom that we have learned (Heiney, 1995). Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and concentration camp survivor, wrote, “For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment” (Frankl, 1963, p. 171). Frankl concluded that life never ceases to have meaning, even in suffering and death. When delivering care, we are witnesses to the meaning in people’s lives even as it gives meaning to our own.

Part of the mission of the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing (CJON)* is to provide practical information necessary to care for patients and their families across the cancer continuum. Our

authors, associate editors, and staff do a fine job of that. But we felt that we were missing something—a place to share our stories, stories to give meaning to the work that we do. They are the heart of oncology nursing.

In the next issue of *CJON*, we will be launching a new column, Heart of On-



We all can tell stories from being on the frontlines delivering cancer care. What have you learned about delivering cancer care and being an oncology nurse?

cology Nursing. Its purpose will be to provide a place to share anecdotes, poetry, and artwork from nurses or others about the meaning of cancer and cancer nursing. We hope that you will consider making a submission. Please encourage others to do so. We hope that the column becomes a place that you first turn to when you receive your journal to be touched by the work that you and your colleagues do.

References

- Frankl, V. (1963). *Man's search for meaning*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Heiney, S.P. (1995). The healing power of story. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 22(6), 899-904.
- Wikipedia. (2008). Storytelling. Retrieved March 6, 2008, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storytelling>

ATTENTION ALL *CJON* READERS: IT'S TIME TO GET CREATIVE!

Everyone has at least one great story, whether it is told or expressed through artwork or poetry. Now, *CJON* is asking you to share your poetry, artwork, anecdotes, or stories about the meaning of cancer and cancer nursing in its new column, Heart of Oncology Nursing. Submissions can be made by nurses, patients, family members, etc. For more information or to submit your work, contact Associate Editor Barb Henry, APRN-BC, MSN, at pubCJON@ons.org.