

LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ellen Giarelli, EdD, RN, CS, CRNP
Terry A. Throckmorton, RN, PhD
Associate Editors

Progress and Challenges in Oncology Advanced Practice: The 2001 Oncology Nursing Society Advanced Practice Nursing Retreat

Mary Pat Lynch, CRNP, MSN, AOCN®

Advanced practice nurses (APNs) in oncology have made great strides since the early 1990s. The role has evolved into a multifaceted one, encompassing clinical nurse specialists (CNSs), nurse practitioners (NPs), and those who practice in a blended role. APNs practice in inpatient and outpatient settings; across urban, suburban, and rural settings; as hospital and clinic employees; and as partners in private practices.

In 2000, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) APN Survey Team surveyed the ONS membership about issues and areas of concern for these individuals (Lynch, Cope, & Murphy-Ende, 2001). As a result of this survey, ONS organized the 2001 ONS APN Retreat as a means to operationalize solutions to some of the identified concerns. Participants developed manuscripts from this work, which will be published in future issues of the *Oncology Nursing Forum* (ONF). In preparation for those reports, this issue's "Leadership & Professional Development" provides an overall view of the retreat outcomes.

The State of the Knowledge Conference on Oncology Advanced Practice Nurses

As a professional organization, ONS has a history of attention to advanced practice issues. In 1994, ONS convened the State of the Knowledge on Oncology Advanced Practice Nursing Conference to bring together clinicians, educators, researchers, and administrators to discuss the role of the APN in oncology. The members of the conference proposed 10 resolutions, which ONS later adopted (Hawkins, 1995).

- Adopt the term "advanced practice nurse" as an umbrella term.
- Explore the need for second licensure.
- Develop a model curriculum for APNs in master's programs.
- Support increased funding and access opportunities for postgraduate education.
- Allow only master's-prepared nurses to sit for the Advanced Oncology Certified Nurse (AOCN®) Examination.



- Explore joint APN certification with other certifying bodies.
- Be involved in the legislative process.
- Revise the ONS standards of advanced practice.
- Incorporate APN outcomes into research priorities.
- Encourage involvement in healthcare decision making.

Oncology Advanced Practice Nurse Role Delineation Studies

Few formal studies have examined the role of the APN in oncology. In 1995, the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC) began exploring the need for offering advanced level certification. To that end, ONCC conducted a role delineation study (McMillan, Heusinkveld, & Spray, 1995). The study analyzed the behaviors and knowledge areas that are specific to oncology APNs. No prior research had examined the differences between bachelor's-prepared and master's-prepared nursing roles. The most frequently performed APN behaviors (direct caregiving and education) were combined with a list of knowledge areas to create a final blueprint that guided item writing for the AOCN® Test.

In the late 1990s, focus in the industry shifted from the CNS role to the NP role and, subsequently, many CNSs returned to school for postmaster's certification as NPs. In 1999, ONCC conducted a second role delineation study, which identified subsequent changes in the APN role (McMillan, Heusinkveld, Spray, & Murphy, 1999). The AOCN® Test Blueprint was updated to more accurately reflect the prevailing oncology advanced practice role. The clinical content was increased,

and the other areas (education, collaboration, consultation, and research) were redistributed.

Oncology Nursing Society Advanced Practice Nursing Survey

In May 2000, ONS established an APN Survey Project Team comprised of three members of the ONS NP Special Interest Group (SIG) and three members of the CNS SIG to ascertain the critical issues inherent in current APN roles in oncology and to plan for future ONS projects for this group. Using the State of the Knowledge on Oncology Advanced Practice from 1994 as a blueprint (Hawkins, 1995), a survey was developed focusing on clinical practice, research, education, and legislative issues. Areas of content were grouped under the following headings.

- Practice
- Outcomes
- Prescriptive authority
- Reimbursement
- Education and continuing education
- Licensure and certification
- Legislative issues
- Challenges facing the oncology APN

Respondents were asked to rank issues in importance for ONS to address. They also were given space to write in answers and identify other areas of importance. Survey results were published in *ONF* (Lynch et al., 2001). The top five priorities were

1. Lack of a succinct definition of APN practice
2. Reimbursement issues
3. Difficulty in documenting outcomes
4. Prescriptive authority
5. Variance in education of APNs.

Mary Pat Lynch, CRNP, MSN, AOCN®, is an oncology nurse practitioner and administrator for the Joan Karnell Cancer Center at the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia.

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/04.ONF.33-34

After reviewing the survey results, the team summarized them and made recommendations to the ONS Board of Directors, including suggestions for projects that would address some of the top APN concerns. Several months later, planning was under way for the 2001 APN Retreat, funded by the ONS Foundation and Aventis Oncology. The team and the ONS Board decided that the retreat format would make a good venue for discussing and strategizing about the APN issues.

The 2001 Advanced Practice Nurse Retreat

Under the direction of ONS staff and the coordinators of the NP and CNS SIGs, a project team comprised of NPs and CNSs focused on the results and recommendations of the APN survey. This team developed a unique format to address issues of mutual concern and to develop strategies for solutions. The work of the 2001 retreat also allowed participants to directly affect the practice of fellow APNs. The 2001 APN Retreat was organized into five project teams, each of which addressed an issue of concern identified in the APN survey. The teams worked on these projects for one year, beginning at the retreat.

Through an application process, 35 APNs were selected to attend the retreat and they were assigned to one of five project teams based on their strengths and interests. The retreat, which was held over three days in Palm Beach, FL, in November 2001, was structured to combine talks by nationally recognized speakers with breakout sessions of the project teams. Each team developed a set of objectives and a timeline for accomplishing those objectives over the following year. The project teams met at the ONS 27th Annual Congress in April 2002 in Washington, DC, and communicated by e-mail and conference calls to accomplish their objectives. All projects were completed by November 2002.

The Project Teams

Standards of Oncology Advanced Practice: This team reviewed, revised, and updated the following ONS publications to reflect the skills and knowledge base needed to practice as an APN in oncology today.

- *Statement on the Scope and Standards of Advanced Practice Nursing in Oncology* (3rd ed.)
- *The Master's Degree with a Specialty in Advanced Practice Oncology Nursing* (4th ed.)
- *Standards of Oncology Nursing Education—Generalist and Advanced Practice Levels* (3rd ed.)

The work of this team addressed several concerns identified in the APN survey, including lack of understanding of the role and variance in educational preparation.

Legislative and Reimbursement Issues: This team provided vital reimbursement and legislative resources that oncology APNs need to practice today. This project team identified key areas of Medicare and non-Medicare reimbursement and developed an online resource for APNs, which was made available on the APN Virtual Community via the ONS Web site. This team surveyed APNs about chemotherapy prescriptive authority to establish whether this was available in each state. The team also made legislative visits during ONS's Hill Day in conjunction with the ONS 27th Annual Congress. They used these visits to educate legislators as well as ONS health policy associates about oncology APN issues.

Online Education for Oncology APNs: This team developed educational programs, discussion forums, and resources for online continuing education that assist the oncology APN in clinical practice. Some issues examined included reviewing health-related Web sites to evaluate their usefulness to the oncology APN and the possibility of providing links to those sites through the ONS Web site. The team evaluated the need to develop criteria to define "advanced practice continuing education" through a set of guidelines that would assist the APN in determining the level of continuing education (e.g., using evidence-based practice, using advanced pathophysiology). The team evaluated and provided access to APN resources for personal digital assistants. Finally, this team addressed continuing education issues for APNs, including level of education and types of educational forums and resources that are beneficial to APNs.

Oncology APN Outcomes: The goal of this team was to encourage APN involvement in outcomes research. The team developed resources for APN outcomes research, guidelines for outcomes documentation, talking points for APNs regarding outcomes, hyperlinks to databases via the APN Virtual Community, and job description templates. Team members estimated the feasibility of a mentorship program for outcomes research and presented a track for Institutes of Learning on professional development. A resource for APNs on outcomes is available on the APN Virtual Community via the ONS Web site. This team also explored the feasibility of a standardized definition and a standardized documentation tool for outcomes research. The team identified the resources needed to educate APNs on outcomes research so that APNs can explore outcomes in their own practice.

Evidence-Based Practice: The goal of this team was to identify the key areas of evidence-based practice that need to be addressed, focusing primarily on symptom management. The team worked in conjunction with the ONS Research Team to accom-

plish several objectives. Primarily, they completed three integrative reviews (pharmacologic management of dyspnea, screening and assessment of insomnia, and exercise as an intervention for fatigue) using clinician-researcher-educator triads. The work of this team complements and expands the Evidence-Based Practice Resource Center on the ONS Web site.

Advanced Practice Nursing Virtual Community

As discussed, ONS created an APN Virtual Community to disseminate the work of the project teams and as a clearinghouse for APN information. A part of the ONS Web site, the site enables APNs to access the information gathered, link to appropriate Web sites and databases, and download documents, such as those on reimbursement and outcomes. The APN Virtual Community was launched in fall 2002.

Future Directions

Working on these projects with a talented group of APN clinicians, researchers, and educators, as well as the ONS staff, has been truly gratifying. These individuals demonstrated commitment and dedication to the development and expansion of the role of the APN in oncology. They were committed to finding solutions to the issues that challenge oncology APN practice, education, and research.

Issues of concern for APNs such as oncology-specific reimbursement, outcomes documentation, contributions to evidence-based practice, and ongoing APN educational needs will continue to challenge APNs. New issues, such as recruitment and retention of APNs and emerging technology, are appearing on the horizon as well. As the field of cancer care continues to expand, the demands on and opportunities for oncology APNs will increase. Resolution of the issues identified here will define and strengthen advanced oncology nursing practice for the 21st century.

References

- Hawkins, R. (1995). Concluding remarks: Window to the future of advanced practice in oncology nursing. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 22(Suppl. 8), 43-45.
- Lynch, M.P., Cope, D.G., & Murphy-Ende, K. (2001). Advanced practice issues: Results of the ONS Advanced Practice Nursing Survey. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 28, 1521-1530.
- McMillan, S.C., Heusinkveld, K.B., & Spray, J. (1995). Advanced practice in oncology nursing: A role delineation study. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 22, 41-50.
- McMillan, S.C., Heusinkveld, K.B., Spray, J.A., & Murphy, C.M. (1999). Revising the blueprint for the AOCN examination using a role delineation study for advanced practice oncology nursing. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 26, 529-537.