

Assessing the Learning Needs of Oncology Nurses

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The Nurse Oncology Education Program (NOEP) is a nonprofit organization of the Texas Nurses Foundation that develops and provides education for nurses in all fields of practice on cancer prevention, detection, treatment, and survivorship. To meet the most current educational needs of nurses, NOEP conducts a biannual needs assessment survey to better understand its audience and inform its course development. The 2013 NOEP needs assessment survey used a convenience sample of licensed nurses throughout the United States. Nurses completed the online survey, and results revealed several priority areas for educational programs, including management of cancer symptoms and treatment side effects, complementary and alternative or integrative medicine, and screening recommendations.

Time was noted as the largest barrier to educating patients and families about primary prevention practices. Results from this survey can be compared to those from previous surveys, particularly the 2009 and 2011 surveys, to determine changes in the demographics of NOEP's constituency, as well as consistencies in educational gaps. The results from the 2013 NOEP needs assessment survey offer valuable information about the learning needs of nurses across the country. The data can be used by the nurse educators and faculty who are responsible for providing cancer-specific education to nurses.

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Cancer is diagnosed in more than 1.6 million Americans annually, which translates to almost 4,600 diagnoses daily (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2014). Cancer is the second leading cause of death in America after heart disease and is estimated to account for almost 1,600 deaths per day (ACS, 2014).

In addition to the increasing prevalence of cancer, those with a cancer diagnosis are living longer than ever before. Sixty-eight percent of Americans diagnosed with cancer are expected to live beyond five years (ACS, 2014). As a result of improved screening tools, enhanced treatments, and more primary prevention strategies, 13.7 million cancer survivors are alive in the United States (de Moor et al., 2013). The number of cancer survivors is projected to reach 18 million by 2020, with continued aging of the population and improvements in survival rates (Stein et al., 2006).

The increasing incidence of cancer and the improving survival rates of those with a cancer diagnosis put pressure on healthcare workers to be knowledgeable about cancer care. Individuals with cancer are encountered in a variety of settings, and providing cancer care in general medical and surgical areas rather than on specialized oncology floors is a continued trend identified more than a decade ago (Satryan, 2001). Nurses in all fields must have a solid foundation in cancer education to best care for this growing population.

Although boards of nursing vary from state to state, a lack of consistent requirement exists for specialty-specific curricula instituted by the boards on programs that prepare U.S. generalist nurses (Volker, Williams, Becker, & Scott, 2011). As an example, the Texas Board of Nursing (2013b) stated that professional nursing education programs are required to include