

Staff stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue related to increasing demands of oncology care have been further compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ambulatory oncology nursing care, with a central focus on the collaborative partnership with patients and families, requires cultivation of the caring and healing environment. The relationships that the oncology nurse has with self, colleagues, and the community support safe, high-quality, and patient- and family-centered oncology care. To foster a caring environment, Take-a-Break, a well-being intervention for oncology clinic nurses, was designed, implemented, and promoted by an oncology clinic nurse and an ambulatory oncology mental health advanced practice RN.

AT A GLANCE

- Increasing demands in oncology care can affect oncology nurses' stress and coping.
- Take-a-Break is relatively inexpensive and adaptable, supporting a caring and healing environment.
- Including creative activities during a break can lift mood and promote oncology nurse self-care.

KEYWORDS

self-care; work breaks; oncology nursing; burnout; wellness; stress

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Take-a-Break Intervention

Improving oncology nurse wellness

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For clinical nurses in practice, failing to take adequate breaks during a shift contributes to the incidence of burnout and workplace fatigue (Magnan et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2004; Singh et al., 2020). Burnout is an ongoing issue in the nursing field, particularly in a subspecialty caring for patients experiencing an emotionally and spiritually taxing disease process like cancer (Cañadas-De la Fuente et al., 2018; Magnan et al., 2015; Rushton et al., 2015). Nurses are usually on the front line when patients receive a difficult cancer diagnosis or prognosis. This can be challenging, particularly during the uncertainty of a pandemic that requires social distancing, more time for donning personal protective equipment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020; Schroeder et al., 2020), and changes to how health care is provided (Fitzpatrick, 2020; Naeim et al., 2020; Schroeder et al., 2020). Combined, all of these influences may be spiritually draining (Rettig et al., 2020; Rushton et al., 2015).

Ambulatory oncology nursing care, with a central focus on a relationship with patients and families, requires attention to the caring and healing environment, which includes self-care and team care (Friese & Himes-Ferris, 2013; Johnson & Ezekielian, 2014; Koloroutis, 2004). Frontline staff partnering with nursing management can create programs that focus on reducing burnout, which, in turn, support safe, high-quality

care (Gillman et al., 2015; Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 2018; Rushton et al., 2015). According to Scammell (2018), work breaks are mandatory in most countries. Work break interventions, such as coffee breaks, relaxation, stretching, and organized activities, are essential components in promoting improved mental and physical well-being, performance, and overall workplace safety (Naeim et al., 2020; Scholz et al., 2019).

During times of crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, breaks take on greater importance to prevent workplace fatigue (CDC, 2020; Naeim et al., 2020; Schroeder et al., 2020). The organization or health-care system can influence the caring and healing environment by providing the infrastructure and resources for breaks (Johnson & Ezekielian, 2014; Mellins et al., 2020; Naeim et al., 2020; Rettig et al., 2020; Schroeder et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020). Scholz et al. (2019) further discussed the multidimensional effect of work breaks in creating positive psychological and physiological impacts for employees, such as increased mood, productivity, and social aspects. Although breaks alone may not address the whole of burnout experienced by nurses, they are a fundamental step in promoting a safe and healthy work environment.

Methods

The Take-a-Break (TAB) intervention was created based on the evidence that addressing clinician burnout is an