

# Zentangle® Pilot Study: A Mindfulness Exercise for Oncology Nurses

McKenzie Klee, BSN, RN, OCN®, Mary Heitschmidt, PhD, APRN, CCRN, FAHA, Theodore Hiemstra, RN, BSN, Krista Lodewyk, RN, BSN, CMSRN®, CURN®, Mary Ellen Hand, RN, BSN, OCN®, Madeline McIntosh, RN, MS, CN-BN, Catherine Yockey, BSN, RN, OCN®, and Jessica Bishop-Royse, PhD, MS



**BACKGROUND:** This study introduced Zentangle®, which involves drawing simple, repetitive lines and shapes to create patterns, as a tool to promote wellness for oncology nurses in a clinical practice setting.

**OBJECTIVES:** The purpose of this study was to determine whether Zentangle used as a meditative activity in an acute time frame decreased stress, fatigue, and burnout while increasing professional quality of life and well-being in oncology nurses.

**METHODS:** Twenty-six oncology nurses participated in a two-hour Zentangle class and received materials to complete art over four weeks. The Perceived Stress Scale, the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System–29, and the Professional Quality of Life measure were administered at selected periods. Twenty-four participants completed the study.

**FINDINGS:** Nurses' well-being, socialization, anxiety, fatigue, secondary traumatic stress levels, and stress levels improved significantly. Most participants noted they would continue using Zentangle after the study. Zentangle is another tool to advance nurses' wellness by encouraging self-care.

## KEYWORDS

Zentangle; oncology nurse; burnout; stress; expressive art intervention

## DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/24.CJON.173-180

**NURSES HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE CARE AND TREATMENT** of patients with cancer. They provide necessary assessments and communicate with providers regarding patients with pathologies that are likely to cause death (Cañadas-De la Fuente et al., 2018). Nurses are at the forefront of this clinical specialty, working daily with high-acuity patients during their most vulnerable times. The role of the oncology nurse includes coordinating patient clinical treatment plans, developing relationships with patients experiencing life-threatening illnesses, providing end-of-life care, and encountering ethical dilemmas; these factors alone make nurses more vulnerable to compassion fatigue (Anderson & Gustavson, 2016). Oncology nurses also support the patient's family and caregivers by building trusting and nurturing relationships that can last a lifetime. Because of the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of patients with cancer and their families, oncology nurses are subject to high levels of stress.

Burnout and fatigue are among the top factors that can directly affect the health of the clinician, and a clinician's well-being has a direct impact on patient health outcomes (Salyers et al., 2017). Oncology nurses have a particularly stressful role as caregivers, which leads to high rates of secondary traumatic stress and burnout (Pfaff et al., 2017; Wentzel & Brysiewicz, 2017). Burnout is "a state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one's occupation and doubtful of one's capacity to perform" (Maslach et al., 1997, p. 209). If oncology nurses do not have appropriate and widely available resources to facilitate mental well-being, workplace stressors can seriously compromise the nurse's mental health and emotional state and may precipitate career burnout. Oncology nurses need self-care initiatives to optimize their well-being in the workplace.

A 2020 survey by the American Nurses Association (n.d.) found that as many as 62% of nurses experienced burnout. Burnout is a particular threat to oncology nurses (Algamdi, 2022) and has increased their turnover rates (Arimon-Pagès et al., 2019; Gómez-Urquiza et al., 2016). Strategies to reduce nurses' stress, anxiety, and burnout include mindfulness techniques (Burton et al., 2017), meditation (Green & Kinchen, 2021), workshops (Foureur et al., 2013; Sarazine et al., 2021), and organizational support programs (Gribben & Semple, 2021; Sullivan et al., 2019). Yoga also decreases stress in nurses (Fang & Li, 2015).

One simple and effective way to combat feelings of mental strain is to practice and implement therapeutic art. Beyond aesthetics, therapeutic art