

ONS ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES AND CURRICULUM FOR UNDERGRADUATE/ PRE-LICENSURE NURSING PROGRAMS



Cancer impacts the health of people in every community and healthcare setting. Cancer care spans prevention, treatment, survivorship, palliative care and end-of-life care. One-third of all cancers are preventable with lifestyle changes and vaccinations. Cancer screening can decrease the development of certain cancers. The risk for cancer increases with age and 65 years is the average age of diagnosis, a time when comorbidities increase the complexity of healthcare delivery. With new cancer treatments and survivorship concerns, there are significant safety and quality concerns for nurses caring for patients in a variety of healthcare settings. Finally, care coordination is needed to provide treatment, survivorship, palliative and end-of-life care for people with cancer.

Nurses new to practice and those without oncology experience are often challenged when caring for patients at risk for or living after a cancer diagnosis. The development of knowledge, skills and attitudes is necessary for the provision of safe, high quality care to people with cancer and is crucial to the advancement of nursing education. The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) collaborated with an expert panel of undergraduate nursing faculty, oncology nurses, and early-career medical-surgical nurses to assess the current requirements for nursing curriculum. This analysis revealed a lack of cancer-related content in pre-licensure baccalaureate curriculum. To address this need, the ONS Board of Directors approved a set of nine (9) core competency statements that define the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by entry-level baccalaureate nursing graduates to effectively care for people at risk for or living after a cancer diagnosis.

Core Competencies

Upon prelicensure program completion, the graduate will:

- Review the impact of cancer on individuals, caregivers, and society.
- Describe how cancer cells differ from normal cells (cell cycle, immunology, targets).
- Understand genetic, environmental, and behavioral risk factors for cancer.
- Use evidence to reduce risk and promote cancer screening practices.
- Understand diagnosis, staging, and classification of tumors that direct treatment, management, and survivorship care.
- Describe the goals of treatment and four pillars of cancer therapy.
- Apply evidence-based strategies to assess, manage, and monitor cancer-related symptoms.
- Explain the transformational impact of cancer nursing practice on patient outcomes and the patient/caregiver experience.
- Participate as a member of the interprofessional team in planning and coordinating care for people with cancer.