



Oncology Nursing Society

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Oncology Nursing Society Legislative and Regulatory Health Policy Agenda 116th Congress, 2nd Session

The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) honors and maintains nursing's historic and essential commitment to advocacy for the public good. ONS works collaboratively with policymakers, cancer and nursing community advocates, and other stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels to advance legislative, regulatory, and programmatic efforts that will reduce and prevent suffering from cancer. As part of this effort, ONS seeks to integrate the nursing perspective throughout the policymaking process and urges that oncology nurses be appointed to all relevant federal panels, committees, commissions, and boards.

Quality Cancer Care

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS, 2020), more than 1.8 million new cancer cases are expected to be diagnosed in 2020. About 606,520 Americans are expected to die of cancer in 2020, which translates to about 1,660 deaths per day. Cancer is the nation's second most common cause of death, exceeded only by heart disease. According to the National Cancer Institute (2020), over the next two decades, the number of cancer survivors in the United States will increase from 16.9 million in 2019 to 26.1 million in 2040. ONS calls on Congress and the Administration* to advance the quality of cancer care in the following ways:

- Advocate for transformative research in advancing cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment to achieve the goals of the National Cancer Moonshot Initiative.
- Promote comprehensive treatment education, personalized cancer care planning, and awareness of major risk factors.
- Ensure access to palliative care and appropriate pain management, as well as psychosocial services.
- Support access to cancer screening, safe and affordable cancer drugs, radiotherapy, and surgery, including reimbursement parity for oral cancer drugs. Support enactment of the Oral Cancer Drug Parity Act.
- Encourage the development of drugs, including biosimilars, to treat cancers, as well as incentives for drugs to treat pediatric cancers.
- Encourage reduction and prevention of tobacco use, as well as e-cigarettes or electronic nicotine delivery systems, and prohibit the sale of covered tobacco products and vaping liquids to individuals younger than 21 years of age.
- Ensure barrier-free cessation insurance coverage to increase availability and utilization of treatment services as outlined in the U.S. Surgeon General's smoking cessation report (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020).
- Increase federal funding for the following:
 - Research at the National Institutes of Health, including the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. Authorize and appropriate new funding to support oncology nurse scientists and sustain and expand quality-of-life, palliative care, and symptom management research.
 - Research and research training at the National Institute of Nursing Research that builds the scientific foundation for clinical practice, prevents disease and disability, manages and eliminates symptoms caused by illness, and improves palliative and end-of-life care
 - Screening, education, early detection, and prevention programs through the CDC, including tobacco prevention and control efforts
 - Implementation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care (The National CLAS Standards)
- Sustain funding for health disparities education and awareness programs through the Agency for Healthcare Research

and Quality, as well as those that address health disparities in cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment, including but not limited to healthcare equity.

- Accelerate the development of innovative cancer care delivery and payment models that improve access to and the provision of quality cancer care and treatment, including access to clinical trials and reimbursement thereof.
- Fund the development of appropriate, risk-adjusted quality and resource use measures for cancer care and delivery and support mechanisms for reporting key quality and resource use data to federal agencies.
- Expand access to primary care, chronic care management, and advance care planning services by supporting reimbursement and other policies that facilitate the provision of those services by oncology nurses.
- Accelerate the establishment and adoption of robust data and interoperability standards, as well as meaningful use and certification criteria, for health information technologies, such as electronic health records, clinical data registries, and digital health applications.
- Facilitate innovative approaches to developing cancer treatments that take into account individual differences in genetics, environments, and lifestyles, and support comparative effectiveness research.
- Eliminate policies that hinder information and access to provider-directed applications of approved therapies.
- Promulgate policies that support transparent labeling of biosimilars and appropriate provider notification when biosimilars are substituted for biologics.

Patient and Staff Safety

Quality cancer care must ensure patient and staff safety. ONS calls on Congress and the Administration to:

- Ensure safe staffing and a safe work environment.
- Ensure staff and patient safety through the provisions of nondiscriminatory cancer care.
- Ensure effective communications between patients and clinicians consistent with landmark legislation such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Establish mechanisms to facilitate the reporting of adverse events associated with the use of health information technology in cancer care delivery and treatment.
- Address the lag in outcomes that disproportionately affect minority populations, including healthcare-related risk factors such as provider biases, poor provider-patient communication, lower levels of health literacy, and inconsistent CLAS implementation.

Workforce and Education

The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health (Institute of Medicine, 2010) recommended that the United States does the following: “Prepare and enable nurses to lead change to advance health. Nurses, nursing education programs, and nursing associations should prepare the nursing workforce to assume leadership positions across all levels, while public, private, and governmental health care decision makers should ensure that leadership positions are available to and filled by nurses” (pp. 282–283).

Nurses directly and profoundly affect the lives of patients and their families and play an integral role in the delivery of quality care. ONS believes the best outcomes in oncology practice are achieved through a highly educated, skilled, and experienced nursing workforce. As a result, ONS strives to support its membership in grassroots advocacy to engage with state and federal legislators and to seek nominations for oncology nurses to serve on relevant local, state, and federal panels; committees, including but not limited to advisory committees; commissions; and boards.

An estimated 3.95 million licensed RNs are living in the United States, of which an estimated 102,000 are oncology nurses. About 47.5% of RNs are older than the age of 50 (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2019). ONS calls on Congress and the Administration to support federal nursing workforce funding and policies and to recognize the important contributions of oncology nursing. To advance these goals, Congress should do the following:

- Enact the Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act, which would encourage education in hospice and palliative nursing and establish programs for advanced practice nurses to train and teach in that area.
- Reauthorize and increase federal funding for the Nurse Education, Expansion, and Development Act of 2009 (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act).

Value of Oncology Nurses

To maintain a robust oncology nursing workforce, federal policies must recognize and reflect the true economic value of oncology nurses' essential contributions to patient safety and outcomes by ensuring that Medicare policies and payments capture and cover the full range of inpatient and outpatient oncology nursing services (e.g., patient treatment education, supportive care, end-of-life care), including those provided by advanced practice nurses.

Scope of Practice

To provide the most comprehensive, cost-effective care, oncology nurses must be able to practice to their full licensure and training. ONS calls on Congress and the Administration to preserve and promote oncology nurses' scope of practice, including within the Medicare and Medicaid programs, ensuring that nurses can practice to the full extent of their licensure and that reimbursement policy is inclusive of nursing.

* The term *Administration* refers to the White House and other federal agencies, such the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

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