

Congratulations and Welcome to the World of Oncology Nursing

The only big event more reliable than weddings this time of year is graduation. College graduations are happening across the globe, of course, but I would like to pause to congratulate our many new and seasoned nursing colleagues who have accomplished the formidable task of completing a stage of their nursing education—be it an associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctoral program. This year, doctoral programs are no doubt swelled by the addition of new doctor of nursing practice programs across the country.

For each of the graduates and their families and friends, this event has special meaning. It represents the culmination of a great deal of work and hard-won achievement. Most graduates, regardless of the level, have wondered whether they would finish successfully.

Associate- and bachelor-level nurses now face the challenge of finding what sort of nurses they want to be. Of course, we all know they cannot go wrong with oncology nursing. I believe that no other specialty challenges nurses to be fully what they were educated to be. We care for every age group and level of seriousness, bringing to bear our scientific knowledge and also providing patients and families with emotional support and holistic healing. Many choices are available to new nurses, but few offer the opportunity to care for patients as comprehensively as does oncology.

Those graduating with advanced degrees probably already have decided on a focus. Many have chosen to be oncology nurses and will be able to apply their newly learned knowledge to improve the healthcare experiences of their patients and to offer their leadership to colleagues in nursing and medicine alike. Those graduating with doctoral degrees have unique talents to offer and will find themselves as teachers, researchers, and knowledge builders. All of them will

fill some very big shoes as we face the inevitable loss of our nursing faculty to retirement.

Graduation is a time for giving presents. Gifts are not possible here, but in addition to my congratulations, I would like to offer a wish to those embarking on the next phase of their careers. My wish for each and every one of you is that you find a mentor in the truest sense of the word—someone whom you can admire and who will care for you and protect you as you find your way in a new role.

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Good mentors are not easy to find, and some prospective mentors might need a bit of convincing. But they do exist, and searching them out is worthwhile.

Mentors are more than people who orient you to a new position. In fact, some of you will find yourselves trailblazing—creating new positions. You may need to work a bit harder to find a nursing mentor than others. Mentors devote themselves to the job of helping you to become the best you can be at your new role. They know not only the system but also what the system needs and how to get the most out of it. Mentors are people who have managed to avoid the cynicism that is rampant in today's health care, who have a good sense of what patients and families need, and who are devoted to providing the best care possible despite system problems. Mentors are current in their knowledge, stay up-to-date on the literature, focus on evidence-based practice, and attend

scientific meetings at least yearly. Mentors take advantage of teachable moments and focus on providing you with all of the tools you need to do your job. Mentors are unselfish and share with you the skills they have gained through the years. They are smart but also understand that knowledge is not the only criterion. Oncology nursing takes people skills, sensitivities, compassion, and empathy, as well as knowledge of the cell cycle, chemotherapy, and the natural history and staging of cancer. Mentors are people to whom you can turn for sustenance when the day drags you down; they will help you find your way back to equilibrium. Mentors are in it for the long haul, not just a few weeks or months.

Finding the right mentor may require a bit of luck, but applying some of the skills you learned in your education will help you take the initiative to find the right person for you and your career. It is the best present you can give yourself.

Being a mentor is a big responsibility but can enrich your professional life and give you the opportunity to provide help and support in a way that will keep giving. If you are asked or want to be considered as a mentor, realize the importance of the commitment but know that you are taking on the opportunity to have a real impact on the professional lives of those you offer to guide. It is a big job but one with many surprising benefits.

Good luck to each of you as you take these next steps in your career. Know that you have chosen the best job in the world. Your success will ensure that nursing remains vital and contributes all that it can to the betterment of our world.

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