

Oncology Nurse Practitioner Competencies

Defining best practices in the oncology setting

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BACKGROUND: The oncology nurse practitioner (ONP) role has evolved since the first ONP competencies were published by the Oncology Nursing Society in 2007. An update was completed in 2019 to reflect the rapidly expanding role.

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this article is to describe the process of the ONP competency development and identify potential applications across a variety of oncology settings.

METHODS: The team performed an extensive literature review of the research about ONP practice across the cancer care continuum. Peer and expert review were conducted to ensure the competencies were comprehensive and relevant.

FINDINGS: The ONP competencies provide a solid, evidence-based benchmark to standardize the ONP role and practice, thereby ensuring that patients receive the highest-quality cancer care.

KEYWORDS

oncology nurse practitioner; competencies; oncology setting; best practices

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NURSE PRACTITIONERS (NPs) PROVIDE A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT of cancer care in the United States. Of the more than 270,000 licensed NPs in the United States, about 3,600 to 4,800 provide cancer care (Bruinooge et al., 2018; Coombs et al., 2019). As a result of the increasing number of patients who receive a cancer diagnosis, oncology NPs (ONPs) have an increased presence across multiple clinical settings (e.g., ambulatory, inpatient, urgent care, survivorship). ONPs make a unique contribution to cancer care, bridging the nursing and medical realms to provide patient-centered care.

Professional associations, such as the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), support standardized practice by setting quality benchmarks, including competencies, and providing context to nurses' roles (American Nurses Association, 2014). ONS has defined competencies for nurses in various roles in oncology, including competencies for NPs, clinical nurse specialists, and generalist nurses.

The first competencies for ONPs were published by ONS in 2007. Because the ONP role has evolved continuously since then, the competencies were revised following an NP summit held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in December 2017. The summit provided a forum for reflection of ONP practice, including a recommendation for revision of the competencies (Mackey et al., 2018).

Process of Competency Development

The ONP competency team convened in January 2019 and included ONPs with clinical expertise in medical oncology, hematology, prevention, wellness, survivorship, clinical trials, and research. The team members provided care in multiple institutions and settings across the United States and included representation from the northeastern, southeastern, southern, midwestern, and western regions. A representative from the Advanced Practitioner Society for Hematology and Oncology (APSHO) joined the team early in the process.