

American Association of Colleges of Nursing: *New Essentials*, Quality and Safety Domain

Cathy Coleman, DNP, RN, CPHQ, CNL

Since 1986, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has published its *Essentials*, a framework to guide all levels of nursing education and practice. This brief overview will describe the latest AACN *Essentials*, including 4 spheres of care and 10 domains of nursing, with an emphasis on the fifth domain focusing on quality and safety. Implications for the specialty of oncology nursing and exemplars for implementation may expedite application of this new education and clinical practice framework.

AT A GLANCE

- Nurses are integral partners and providers in rapidly changing, complex healthcare systems.
- AACN has introduced a new competency-based framework to bridge gaps at the entry and advanced levels between nursing education and practice.
- Quality and safety are interdependent and represent 1 of 10 new domains of nursing with associated core competencies that will become increasingly essential for integration into academic nursing programs and the oncology specialty's education and practice.

KEYWORDS

quality and safety; AACN Essentials; nursing practice; nursing education

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/23.CJON.199-203

According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2022) and other leading organizations such as the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS, n.d.), the integration of principles and practices related to quality and safety contribute to better outcomes for patients, populations, payers, and health systems (Coleman, 2019; Mulvey & Bloom, 2021). Since its formation in 1975, ONS has provided a solid foundation of knowledge, essentials, standards, and position statements to advance the specialty of oncology nursing and access to quality cancer care (Carr, 2015; ONS, n.d.). Since 1986, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2021) has taken the lead in defining, publishing, and updating three versions of its *Essentials* addressed to baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral education for the nursing profession. Based on major changes, chaos, complexity, and progress in health care in the 21st century, AACN convened nursing leaders, educators, and clinicians to create not only a new vision for competency-based nursing education, but also an evidence-based, new paradigm for nursing as a discipline. The new AACN (2021) *Essentials* intends to bridge the gaps between education and practice, and to respond to the needs of students, employers, the public, interprofessional partners, accrediting agencies, and academic faculty. AACN anticipates that active implementation may begin in 2024 after a three-year transition period. This article provides a brief overview of selected components of the new AACN *Essentials*, including the following: (a) 4 spheres of care; (b) 10 domains, concepts, and competencies for nursing education; and (c) current exemplars for integrating the fifth domain, quality and safety, into oncology nursing practice.

Role of AACN

To define and reinforce quality in nursing education, the AACN (2021) *Essentials* suggests that future curriculum development achieve competencies in support of the following two defined levels of nursing education: (a) entry-level professional nursing and (b) advanced-level nursing. The first level includes education programs that aim for degree completion and are meant to prepare graduates as generalists. The second level prepares graduates for practice in advanced practice nursing roles or a nursing practice