Perspectives on Self-Advocacy: Comparing Perceived Uses, Benefits, and Drawbacks Among Survivors and Providers

Teresa L. Hagan, PhD, RN, Margaret Q. Rosenzweig, PhD, CRNP-C, AOCN®, Kristin K. Zorn, MD, G. Josie van Londen, MD, MS, and Heidi S. Donovan, PhD, RN

Self-advocacy, defined as a cancer survivor's ability to get his or her needs met in the face of a challenge, is a critical skill for those facing the overwhelming disease and psychological burdens of cancer (Hagan & Donovan, 2013a, 2013b). Self-advocacy consists of three main skills: (a) making informed decisions, (b) finding strength through connection with others, and (c) communicating effectively with the oncology care team. Survivors need to be equipped with these skills to ensure that they can engage in their care, make personally meaningful decisions, and voice their concerns, particularly when it is difficult or uncomfortable (Walsh-Burke & Marcusen, 1999). Survivors can use these skills throughout their cancer experience to face their ongoing symptom management and meet their health promotion needs.

Protecting survivors’ rights to self-determination is upheld as a professional duty by all healthcare providers. Provision 3 of the American Nurses Association’s