

Foundation Program in Oncology and Hematology for Newly Recruited Nurses

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There is a constant need to educate and upskill nurses who are new to oncology settings. This article describes the outcomes of an education quality improvement (QI) project at an Organisation of European Cancer Institutes–accredited cancer center in Ireland. Using an action research (AR) methodology, a hospital-based education program was designed and evaluated. Program development occurred over two AR cycles.

First-cycle evaluation of nurse participants found that the course curriculum was relevant and improved nurses' confidence in their clinical abilities. In the second cycle, the class changed from in-person to online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Evaluation data suggested that online learning was acceptable, supported greater access to the program, and offered financial and time-saving benefits.

AT A GLANCE

- AR methodology was used in developing the curriculum to ensure that educational needs of new hematology-oncology nurses were addressed.
- Classroom, simulation, and practice-based learning improved nurses' clinical confidence.
- The program enabled sharing of specialist knowledge to new hematology-oncology nurses, providing a bridge between nurse orientation and postgraduate requirements.

KEYWORDS

quality improvement; nursing education; training; education; action research

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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Nurses provide necessary patient and family education that can improve patient outcomes (Lively et al., 2020). To support informed, safe patient care, nurses must complete comprehensive continuing education courses and programs (Ge et al., 2015). Hospital-based programs provide education to ensure nurse competency and facilitate a bridge to postgraduate requirements (Kinsella et al., 2018).

According to Dempsey and Assi (2018), quality improvement (QI) initiatives that foster and maintain highly engaged nursing staff provide a foundation to achieve desired safety and quality outcomes. The Foundation Program in Oncology/Hematology is an evidence-based QI project developed to address the education gap between nurses new to clinical practice and experienced specialist nurses. It addressed a lack of standardized knowledge and established consistent learning outcomes for newly recruited nurses. This article reviews the development and efficacy of the project.

Methodology

The QI project used an action research (AR) methodology described by Coughlan and Coughlan (2002), relying on nurse experts to establish a formal education program and bridging content from the orientation process and content in postgraduate curricula.

Study Site

This project was conducted at the Hematology, Oncology, and Palliative Care directorate at St. James's Hospital, an Organisation of European Cancer Institutes–accredited cancer center in Dublin, Ireland. The program was designed for newly recruited nurses who would be providing hematology and oncology care. Approximately 200 nurses are employed at the directorate, ranging from qualified general nurses with without specialized education in oncology or hematology to nurses with specialized postgraduate education and extensive experience, including clinical nurse specialists, advanced nurse practitioners, and clinical nurse managers.

Program Overview

Nurses learn and acquire knowledge when they work with experts and have access to their expertise. A study by Rosenzweig et al. (2012) found that nurses' learning is influenced by their work environment and that disease-specific education is dependent on the cancer center where a nurse