FROM THE EDITOR

Next-Generation Symptom Science in Oncology Nursing

Debra Lyon, RN, PhD, FNP-BC, FAAN

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The 2023 Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) Congress® was outstanding. More than 3,000 attendees gathered to focus on oncology nursing in San Antonio, Texas. The timing of ONS Congress coincided with Fiesta, the annual festival held in April in San Antonio. Although the city itself was bustling, ONS Congress felt even more energized by the enthusiasm of thousands of oncology nurses. ONS Congress was filled with sessions that presented innovations in practice, education, and research. As the editor of Oncology Nursing Forum, I attended the sessions as a learner, presenter, and researcher. Given my long-term focus on symptom science in oncology nursing and chronic conditions, I was delighted to see renewed attention to symptom science. For me, one of the highlights was attendance at the pre-conference Precision Health Symptom Science Mini-Symposium. The symposium attendees filled a packed room with excited conversations focused on multiple topics in symptom science, including symptom management and quality of life, technology and implementation, data science and biomarkers, health behaviors and diversity, and math and models. The panel of experts had broad and deep expertise in symptom science across multiple focal areas. Members of the panel included nurse researchers who did some of the seminal research in symptom science and others who are contributing unique and contemporary lenses to the evolution of the field. At ONS Congress, posters and presentations highlighted research addressing symptom science in multiple contexts, with expansive foci to include important and wide-reaching issues such as social determinants of health, including neighborhood effects on cognitive symptoms; collaborative research networks to recruit rural residents to a cancer symptom management trial; and interindividual variability and demographic, clinical, and genetic predictors of musculoskeletal pain in individuals taking aromatase inhibitors for breast cancer. The breadth and evolution of symptom science was evident in these and many other posters, presentations, and lectures.

Although the significance and impact of symptom science is clear to patients, families, and nurse scientists, work in the field is at a critical juncture; we must focus on moving the science to targeted intervention studies while conducting the basic science and developing statistical models to further undergird the future of oncology nursing-focused symptom science. For this to occur, further identification of funding sources is indicated for the multisite studies that will be necessary for intervention trials. Because the National Institute of Nursing Research no longer lists symptom science as a priority, for larger trials, nurse scientists will need to pursue funding opportunities at multiple National Institutes of Health institutes. Further conversation with representatives from the National Cancer Institute and other National Institutes of Health institutes is needed to broaden the funding available for symptom science research. Oncology symptom scientists may also want to consider the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute for survivor symptoms and

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comorbidities, including cardiac effects. For older cancer survivors, the National Institute on Aging’s focus on extending the health years of individuals is concurrent with symptom science focus on functional status and quality-of-life outcomes. Similarly, the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health’s concept of whole-person health is concurrent with symptom science focus on systems, including physiological and psychosocial variables. Finally, the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities envisions that populations will have an equal opportunity to live long, healthy, and productive lives and focuses on advancing the science of minority health and health disparities. Given the disparities in cancer outcomes, quality of life, and symptom burden, further consideration of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities is an important avenue for understanding disparities in individuals, families, and communities affected by cancer who bear the burden of disparate outcomes, including heightened symptom burden.

In all, the future of symptom science depends on the continued development of the science. Several generations of oncology nursing symptom scientists have dedicated their research careers to this focus; supporting upcoming researchers to move forward this important area while using the frameworks, tools, and most promising funding sources for this work will be necessary to continue the development of science and its applications to clinical care. To move forward this focus on symptom science, the Oncology Nursing Forum Editorial Board is excited to announce a call for articles for a themed issue in spring 2024 focused on precision symptom science in oncology nursing. We welcome the submission of manuscripts about new or emerging approaches and outcomes of precision symptom science that are relevant for oncology nurses. Manuscripts can focus on various aspects of precision symptom science, including symptom management; technology and implementation science; data science and biomarkers; and health behaviors, diversity, and inclusive practices. We welcome team science-focused articles and submissions from authors at various career stages. Researcher and clinical collaborations are of high interest to our community of oncology nurses. Rachel Pozzar, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, and Memnun Seven, PhD, RN, will serve as coeditors, with me, of the symptom science–themed issue. We look forward to your contributions to the continued development, refinement, and innovation of symptom science focused on individuals, families, and communities affected by cancer.

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