

# From Student to Practicing Oncology Nurse: A Novel Collaboration to Create a Transition to Practice Program in Ambulatory Cancer Care

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**Background:** Healthcare reform and the shift of care to the ambulatory setting has created challenges for preparing nurses to practice in these complex clinical settings. Oncology is an area where dramatic transitions to ambulatory care have occurred, and the ambulatory oncology setting holds great potential for teaching evidence-based care to nursing students.

**Objectives:** The article summarizes the collaboration between a baccalaureate nursing program and a cancer clinic to establish a dedicated education unit (DEU).

**Methods:** A pilot project was undertaken to create the DEU and residency program.

**Findings:** The collaboration has provided a clinical setting for baccalaureate nursing students to learn and develop clinical competencies, advance their critical thinking skills, and enhance advanced pathophysiology knowledge. The scope of the program includes a transition-to-practice model which maximizes the use of the DEU as students graduate and are eligible to apply for the oncology residency program. The DEU has created a pipeline for new nurses.

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Oncology nursing practice involves technical expertise, significant clinical knowledge, and the ability to implement rapidly changing evidence-based research findings to practice. A joint report from the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (IHMD, 2011), *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, helped to create a national policy relative to nurse practice and education. Incorporated within this report was a call for novel education models that would engage communities, academic institutions, and clinical centers of practice (HMD, 2011). Distinct and urgent needs are apparent for future oncology nursing practice that are complicated by the dramatic shift

from the hospital to the clinic and ambulatory settings, changing both the recruitment and preparation of cancer care nurses.

Dedicated education units (DEUs), which are collaborations between clinical and academic institutions for nursing students, have been established with reported success in improving nursing education and clinical care of patients (Freundl et al., 2012; Moscato, Miller, Logsdon, Weinberg, & Chorpensing, 2007; Murray & James, 2011; O'Lynn, 2013; Rhodes, Meyers, & Underhill, 2012; Warner & Burton, 2009). DEUs have been successfully implemented in multiple clinical settings, including inpatient oncology units (Dean et al., 2013; Edgcombe, Wotton, Gonda, & Mason, 1999). Although most DEUs are created in inpatient clinical settings, DEUs and sites for undergraduate