

Standardizing Roles

Evaluating oncology nurse navigator clarity, educational preparation, and scope of work within two healthcare systems

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BACKGROUND: Since the introduction of patient navigation, challenges persist in standardizing the oncology nurse navigator (ONN) role, educational preparation, and scope of work.

OBJECTIVES: With a goal of systemwide understanding of navigation services, two healthcare institutions examined the educational preparation, responsibilities, and understanding of the ONN role.

METHODS: Two nurse leaders in navigation concurrently used surveys, focus groups, and interprofessional discussions to assess the current state of navigation within their comparable organizations. They aggregated their findings, identified commonalities, and shared standardization approaches.

FINDINGS: Data demonstrated noteworthy variation in ONNs' academic preparation, professional certifications, job titles, and scope of work. Additional findings included overall lack of understanding of the role and responsibilities of ONNs, inconsistent role preparation and implementation, random tracking of methods and metrics, and insufficient job-related resources.

KEYWORDS

oncology nurse navigator; role standardization; certification; navigation

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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EARLY ADOPTERS OF NAVIGATION FOR PATIENTS WITH CANCER recognized the prerequisite for successful implementation of navigation services was to standardize processes, develop tools and resources, and measure navigator-sensitive patient outcomes (Freund et al., 2014; Newcomer, 2014). A series of publications contribute to efforts to standardize the oncology nurse navigation role. The Association of Community Cancer Centers (2009) created a monograph detailing tools and resources for programs implementing navigation, and Catholic Health Initiatives (2012) released a navigation resource guide.

The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) formulated positions pertaining specifically to the oncology nurse navigator (ONN) role and, in collaboration with the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC), conducted two ONN role delineation studies (Brown et al., 2012; Lubjeko et al., 2017). The ONN Core Competencies, first issued in 2013, were revised and published in 2017 by ONS. Ready access to these resources appeared to set the stage for standardization of oncology nurse navigation.

This article describes how nurse navigation leaders within two comparable, large healthcare systems independently assessed the ONN role within their respective systems. Similarities between the healthcare systems were number of hospital and clinic locations, large geographic areas, number of employees and providers, amount of ONNs employed, and experienced consolidation of regions allowing for systemwide standardization. Later, they collaboratively identified mutual barriers and variations to consistent, effective, and sustainable delivery of navigation services within oncology care. Both systems implemented, or have plans to implement, the same strategies and solutions to overcome the barriers and variations identified, with the intent of systemwide uniformity in the application of navigation services.

Sutter Health Experience

Sutter Health is one of several large healthcare organizations and academic centers in northern California. It is a not-for-profit healthcare system, serving 27% of the population in 22 Northern California counties. The Sutter Health system is comprised of 24 acute care hospitals and 5 medical foundations with 53,000 employees and 12,000 affiliated physicians. Sutter Health diagnoses nearly 15,000 new cancer cases per year.