

Nurse Navigator Responsibilities in Managing Care Transitions for the Patient With Acute Myeloid Leukemia

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Oncology nurse navigators (ONNs) help address barriers that would affect the patient's ability to receive timely and quality cancer care and bridge gaps from the ambulatory to acute settings by reinforcing the treatment plan. For patients with acute myeloid leukemia, caregivers and medical teams are valuable resources when navigating the complexities of the healthcare environment. Developing ONN roles to manage transitions from acute to ambulatory care supports patients and organizations, and offers patients emotional support, education, and solutions to barriers of care.

AT A GLANCE

- Patients with acute myeloid leukemia have many unique and time-sensitive needs during transitions of care settings.
- Creating a transitions ONN role may improve patient satisfaction and continuity of care.
- The transitions ONN can help balance the differing priorities and perspectives of the acute and ambulatory clinical teams and prioritize the patient's desired treatment plan and quality of life.

KEYWORDS

navigation; nurse navigator; care coordination; leukemia; care transitions

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In 1990, H.P. Freeman, MD, launched the first patient navigation program in the United States in Harlem, New York. The core function of this new position was to eliminate barriers to timely care across all phases of the healthcare continuum (Freeman, 2012). The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS, 2017) defines an oncology nurse navigator (ONN) as “a professional RN with oncology-specific clinical knowledge who offers individualized assistance to patients, families, and caregivers to help overcome healthcare system barriers. Using the nursing process, an ONN provides education and resources to facilitate informed decision-making and timely access to quality health and psychosocial care throughout all phases of the cancer continuum” (p. 4). The ONN role has developed into a vital position in the healthcare system, particularly for patients with a volatile cancer diagnosis such as acute myeloid leukemia (AML). Of note, the descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of an ONN include all phases of the healthcare continuum; however, for more than 20 years, nurse navigators have been primarily based in clinics with a focus on the ambulatory setting (Cantril et al., 2019). In addition, research highlights disparities in standard practice for the ONN related to patient hospitalization and responsibilities during transitions in care settings (Cantril et al., 2019). This highlights a gap in care for patients with AML because patients spend several days in acute settings, experience transitions of care often, and frequently have urgent and numerous care needs (Jensen et al., 2023). This gap includes delays in treatment and psychological stress for patients and caregivers among other patient and staff dissatisfiers (Albrecht & Bryant, 2019). The emergence of a new hematologic malignancy transitions nurse navigator shows promise to close this gap. This article will describe the transitions ONN role and identify responsibilities and ideal characteristics for a nurse in this position.

Current State of Oncology Nurse Navigation

A nurse navigator provides expert-level clinical education and is a central and highly regarded member of the patient's care team. This nursing contact and their expertise provides reassurance and reduces patient stress (Albrecht & Bryant, 2019; Hudson et al., 2018). The nurse navigator has a comprehensive understanding of the healthcare system. Nurse navigators empower patients