Use These Resources to Delve Into Genetics

I know that I need to learn more about genetics and how it influences cancer development and treatment. I also know that I’m not alone; Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) membership surveys consistently find that nurses note “genetics” as a topic they feel they need to know more about. So, why aren’t textbooks on genetics flying off the shelves? Why aren’t conference presentations about genetics packed to the rafters?

Many reasons probably apply. One is the sheer enormity and complexity of the subject matter. I didn’t like classes about genetics when I was in nursing school (25 years ago), and I still don’t. Another reason why nurses like me are reluctant to get informed about genetics is the perception that the field of genetics is related only indirectly to clinical practice. If you are nodding your head and thinking that the topic of genetics is overwhelming, is incomprehensible, and does not pertain to your mind? If so, it’s time to get informed about genetic influences and cancer.

When you hear the word “carrier,” does a naval ship filled with aircraft come to mind? If so, it’s time to get informed about genetic influences and cancer.

Oncology Practice: Cancer Risk Assessment (Tranin, Masny, & Jenkins, 2002). The quiz, “How Frequently Do You Use or Provide Genetics Information?,” was an eye-opener for me. Simple things that clinicians do all the time, such as advising people to use sunscreen, actually are genetics-related activities. I was surprised to learn that we have reprinted this book chapter, “Why Should Oncology Nurses Be Interested in Genetics?,” in this issue (see pages 576–580) so you, too, can learn why oncology nurses should be interested in genetics and assess how often you provide genetics information in your daily practice. I think you will be surprised by how often you engage in genetics-related activities without realizing it.

ONS has developed two positions on genetics. “Cancer Predisposition Genetic Testing and Risk Assessment Counseling” and “The Role of the Oncology Nurse in Cancer Genetic Counseling” note how the gap between advances in genetics and their clinical application is narrowing and how all oncology nurses will be expected to provide information about genetics related to cancer prevention, risk management, early detection, and cancer treatment. Both positions can be found on ONS Online (www.ons.org, select ONS Publications, and click on ONS Positions).

In this issue, the “Test Your Knowledge” column is titled “Understanding the Basics of Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer.” Less than 10 years ago, the cancer susceptibility genes breast cancer gene 1 (BRCA1) and BRCA2 were identified. Much has happened in the field of breast and ovarian cancer treatment during the past decade that is directly attributable to identification of these genes. This issue’s “Test Your Knowledge” column is interactive and prompts you to apply your genetics knowledge to clinical situations to which you can relate.

Do I know everything I need to know about genetic influences and cancer now that I have read the Genetics and Cancer Care tool kit, ONS positions, and the Genetics in Oncology Practice book? No. But I do know much more now than I did a few weeks ago, and, more importantly, I have learned that the topic of genetics is not one to be feared and avoided; it is one that is actually fun to learn about.

Reference


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