Highly Reliable Health Care in the Context of Oncology Nursing: Part II

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The principles of reliability science are used in various high-risk and high-tech industries to improve quality and safety. In part one of this two-part series, three of the five principles (the principles of anticipation) were discussed as they pertain to delivering oncology care in challenging and variable circumstances. This article will address the final two principles (the principles of containment) and examine how a healthcare organization responds when an error in treatment has occurred.

The term *expertise* is the experience, learning, and knowledge found not only in an individual person, but also in a team of people working together (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Expertise in mitigating an adverse event may not be matched with the hierarchical position of the person who has been charged to mitigate the event. Sometimes, the person with a higher position of authority may not be the best person to react to an adverse event. For example, instead of defaulting to management to make all decisions, the oncology nurse at the bedside may be the best person to make some decisions based on what the decision entails. Decisions about how to handle an event are given to those who have the most expertise regarding the event, regardless of their title or rank. A case study provided in this article describes a response scenario to an action taken in an oncologic emergency situation by an experienced staff nurse who made an independent decision which was contrary to the orders of the nurse manager. Because the experienced oncology nurse had more knowledge about the oncologic emergency of spinal cord compression than the preceptee, the experienced nurse altered the educational plans set by management. In an organization that values the expertise of every team member, staff members are not only encouraged to identify problems like this, but also are expected to identify and solve problems when they arise (Luria, Muething, Schoettker, & Kotagal, 2006). Leadership’s role should be for the infrequent and more complex problems.

Mindfulness

Use of the five principles of reliability science are collectively called *mindfulness* (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). When staff at an oncology organization use these principles, they are in a position to swiftly anticipate, respond, detect, and correct unexpected events (Niedner et al., 2013). Figure 1 illustrates examples of the five principles and applies them to oncology nursing. Becoming mindful...