Oncology Nurses and the Experience of Participation in an Evidence-Based Practice Project

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Nursing is the largest profession in the U.S. healthcare workforce and has been nationally recognized for its potential to lead transformation in health care (Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2010). Transforming health care will require the generation and use of current and high-quality research to improve organizational and patient outcomes. In other words, improving healthcare quality in the United States will require evidence-based practice (EBP). EBP is in contrast to practice that is based on tradition, routine, personal preference, or opinion (Rutledge & Bookbinder, 2002). A large gap exists between what research has shown and what healthcare providers actually use in practice, so patients do not “reap the full benefit” of the investment in research (IOM, 2001, p. 145). Because of the recognized importance of the nursing profession as a major player in transforming the healthcare system with relation to the Affordable Care Act (2013), healthcare providers should strive to implement EBP.

Nursing leaders describe implementing EBP as a complicated and elusive goal (McCorkle, 2009). Many nursing studies have documented the struggles nurses face in accessing, evaluating, and implementing EBP. In an integrative review of studies using the BARRIERS scale, frequently used to assess nurses’ use of research in practice, barriers to research use (e.g., limited access to information, limited ability to interpret information, limited ability to apply information) were found during a 15-year period from 1991–2006 (Carlson & Plonczynski, 2008). Nurses outside of the United States have also identified those obstacles (Gerrish et al., 2007). The challenge to the actualization of EBP in oncology nursing is addressed by the Oncology Nursing Society’s current research agenda, which includes translational research as a priority (Berger, Cochrane, & Mitchell, 2009). Translational research explores the knowledge-to-practice gap in an effort to improve the quality of nursing practice.

Survey research in nursing has shown little increase in nursing use of EBP, reporting consistent obstacles. Many of those obstacles have been more recently attributed to the nursing workplace, shifting the focus of EBP research away from individual nurse factors to the contextual variables affecting EBP (Kitson, 2007). Nurse leaders stress the importance of creating nursing work environments with an infrastructure conducive to and supportive of EBP (Gerrish et al., 2012; Titler, Everett,