Introduction of Novice Oncology Nurses to End-of-Life Care

Andria P. Caton, RN, OCN®, CHPN, and Paula Klemm, DNSc, RN, OCN®

Dying patients and their families often have unique physical, psychosocial, social, and spiritual needs that require specialized end-of-life (EOL) skills. EOL preparation of nurses has been inconsistent. Novice nurses need guidance to develop the knowledge, clinical skills, and coping strategies to provide high-quality and compassionate EOL care. Inadequate preparation for providing EOL care can lead to anxiety, stress, and burnout. Barriers that prevent adequate preparation and support of novice nurses in EOL care include lack of education, financial constraints, poor staffing, and major life changes. However, opportunities are available to support novice oncology nurses as they develop the skills necessary to provide competent EOL care. Nurse extern programs and individually tailored orientation plans that include EOL care should be developed. Careful selection of mentors and preceptors is an important aspect in planning orientation for novice oncology nurses. The presence of peers experienced in EOL care is crucial. Educational materials, standards of practice, and continuing education on EOL care should be available to novice nurses as well. EOL competencies may provide a blueprint to help with performance evaluations. Adequate preparation of novice oncology nurses for EOL care will improve patient outcomes, increase job satisfaction, and promote longevity in the specialty.