Do You Know Quality Care When You See It?

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The mission of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) is to promote excellence in oncology nursing and quality cancer care, but have you ever considered how that mission comes to life in your daily practice? Just as it can be challenging to describe the essence of nursing practice beyond listing specific tasks we perform each day, it may be difficult to routinely identify high-quality care. Our time is often drawn to clearly problematic areas of clinical care. Although this always will be necessary, changes associated with healthcare reform, reimbursement, and accreditation efforts highlight the need to also demonstrate consistently good clinician performance and patient outcomes.

Carolyn Clancy, MD, director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), defined healthcare quality as “getting the right care to the right patient at the right time—every time” (AHRQ, 2009, “What Is Quality?” para. 1). Do you know what the “right care” is? Can you demonstrate that it consistently is provided in your practice? Although many nurses might reply that they simply recognize good care when they see it, standards of care should be derived from a strong evidence base; high-quality care that achieves those standards can be quantified and compared across organizations through use of nationally tested quality measures. Evidence-based nursing practice (EBP) is not a new concept, and the link between EBP and quality cancer care is a critical one. In “Advocating for Quality Cancer Care: Making Evidence-Based Practice a Reality,” ONS member Kathi Mooney noted the need to transform the nursing role from a traditional “doer” based on local policy or personal preferences to one of a clinical “knowledge worker” with an ever-changing evidence base (Mooney, 2001).

Without a doubt, keeping abreast of rapidly changing clinical information is a daunting task. ONS strives to provide a wide range of resources to help keep nurses up to date on the latest evidence important to those providing care to patients with cancer. The 2012–2016 ONS Strategic Plan addresses four pillars on which to focus efforts—knowledge, leadership, technology, and, for the first time, quality. Resources from all four areas provide oncology nurses what they need to recognize and illustrate high-quality cancer care (see Figure 1).

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Once the standard of care for a particular problem has been defined, how can we ascertain whether staff are consistently achieving it? The ONS Foundation has supported the development and testing of ambulatory oncology quality measure sets focused on the care of patients as they receive IV chemotherapy regimens (the Breast Cancer Care [BCC] measures) and during the 12-month period immediately following treatment completion for early-stage breast cancer (the Breast Cancer Survivorship [BCS] measures). More information can be found at www.ons.org/research/quality.

The BCC and BCS quality measures are derived from ONS Putting Evidence Into Practice and other evidence sources, and include process, outcome, and composite indicators to quantify consistency of symptom assessments, interventions to prevent and manage clinically significant symptoms, essential education and follow-up care, and patient-centered goal setting and achievement. Those measures are in pilot testing at a wide variety of clinical practice sites across the nation to ensure that results will be comparable for future benchmarking purposes no matter whether they are collected in a small, rural private practice or at a large, urban National Cancer Institute–designated cancer center. Future work may include measures for additional cancer populations, with emphasis on creating measures that complement the ongoing work in other quality programs. Similar efforts are underway at the American Society of Clinical Oncology (n.d.) with their Quality Oncology Practice Initiative® to promote excellence in cancer care by helping practices create a culture of self-examination and improvement.

Preliminary results of the BCC and BCS quality measures projects indicate that many organizations observe areas for potential improvement; ONS and the ONS Foundation are working to create resources to support those local and national quality improvement efforts. In today’s healthcare environment, it no longer is enough just to look around your clinical practice and see quality care in action. We must also demonstrate how consistently we do so. Evidence-based practice helps us to define our standards, quality measures let us know if we are hitting the mark, and implementation and educational efforts support ongoing quality improvement efforts, making the ONS mission come to life in your practice every day.

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