The role of the oncology nurse navigator (ONN) emerged in the late 1990s following the success of a pilot project by Harold Freeman, MD, in New York City’s Harlem Hospital (Freeman, Muth, & Kerner, 1995). Although the original concept of navigation was aimed at reducing healthcare disparities in underserved communities using lay navigators, the role of ONN has been reworked and individualized by organizations to fit the needs specific to their programs. The purpose of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) Oncology Nurse Navigator Role Delineation Study was to examine the job-function activities of ONNs, thereby providing an understanding of this new role.

Historically, the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC) has conducted role delineation studies to define the responsibilities of a particular role in oncology nursing, as well as the knowledge necessary for competent job performance in that role. Following the first ONC® certification examination in 1986, the first role delineation study was conducted in 1989 to ensure that the certification examination was a reflection of nurses’ knowledge and ability to apply that knowledge in practice. The results were used to assess the content validity of the ONC® credentialing examination, administered by ONCC, as well as examine how the content related to job function and provide input for future test questions (McMillan, Heusinkveld, Chai, Miller Murphy, & Huang, 2002). Since 1989, role delineation studies have been conducted for all of the ONCC certification programs at least every five years as a means to maintain a strong representation of current oncology nursing knowledge and practice on the ONCC examinations, as well as establish content validity for the certification programs.

To have a unique interpretation and function of the role of the ONN, ONS undertook a Nurse Navigation Think Tank in the summer of 2010. One of the Think Tank recommendations was for ONS to conduct a role delineation study to understand the function and role of the ONN. The purpose of the 2010 ONS ONN Role Delineation Study was to examine the job-function activities of the ONN, thus providing a foundation for future ONS-related activities.