Providing Grief Resolution as an Oncology Nurse Retention Strategy: A Literature Review

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Oncology nurses play a pivotal role in optimizing care provided to patients at the end of life (EOL). Although oncology nurses commonly provide EOL care and witness deaths of patients that they have maintained long-standing relationships with, they are frequently excluded from grief resolution endeavors. With a worldwide shortage of oncology nurses, retention is paramount to ensuring that the care patients with cancer receive is not jeopardized. Various strategies were identified to resolve grief and increase nurse retention, including creating supportive work environments, debriefing with colleagues, providing EOL and grief education, and altering patient care assignments. Future research on emerging technologies and their effects on oncology nurse coping and retention strategies also was suggested.

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Grief Terminology

Grief is defined as a consequence to loss (Conte, 2011). Although grief often is referred to in response to a loss, grief also may be experienced in anticipation of a loss (Dunne, 2004) or delayed after a death (Brown & Wood, 2009). Bereavement is the state of experiencing a loss (Buglass, 2010). Compassion fatigue (CF) is exhaustion that arises from becoming too emotionally attached to patients and families (Aycoc & Boyle, 2009). Burnout arises from a cumulative, prolonged