Oncology Nurse Generalist Competencies

Oncology Nursing Society’s initiative to establish best practice

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BACKGROUND: A project team was formulated to create evidence-based oncology nurse generalist competencies (ONGCs) to establish best practices in competency development, including high-risk tasks, critical thinking criteria, and measurement of key areas for oncology nurses.

OBJECTIVES: This article aims to describe the process and the development of ONGCs.

METHODS: This article explains how the ONGCs were accomplished, and includes outcomes and suggestions for use in clinical practice.

FINDINGS: Institutions can use the ONGCs to assess and develop competency programs, offer educational strategies to measure proficiency, and establish processes to foster a workplace committed to mentoring and teaching future oncology nurses.

ONCOLOGY NURSES PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE in delivering quality care to patients with cancer. Given the intricate healthcare needs of people with cancer, comprehensive knowledge, high-level engagement with interprofessional teams, self-reflection, critical thinking, and clinical skills are essential to ensuring the safe delivery of high-quality nursing care in the healthcare environment. Nurses are equipped to provide safe, proficient, and effective interventions to people with cancer across the disease trajectory, from preventive screening to end-of-life care. The complex technological environment, coupled with the ever-evolving science and rapid assimilation of research into practice in the oncologic specialty, requires oncology nurses to attain and maintain a high level of competency to adequately and safely care for people with cancer. The Oncology Nurse Generalist Competencies (ONGC) (Oncology Nursing Society [ONS], 2016) provide a framework to ensure quality outcomes.

Background

As noted in ONGC (ONS, 2016), the Institute of Medicine ([IOM], 2011), now referred to as the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, published The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, which offers recommendations for improving nursing practice. IOM (2011) capitalized on the necessity of educating nurses and assessing their competency over time to ensure high-quality care. In 2016, IOM published an update to the report, stating that, although improvements had been made, more were needed. In addition, they described the nurse’s responsibility of providing a “continuum of services” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016, p. 1), including delivering direct patient care, promoting health, educating patients, and coordinating care (ONS, 2016).

In Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century, IOM (2001) identified several components to a high-quality cancer care delivery