Achieving Quality Oncology Practice Initiative Certification Through Quality Improvement

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The public and healthcare payers are increasingly looking to specialty designations and certifications to determine the quality of cancer centers. The Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI®) Certification Program is one way for cancer centers to demonstrate commitment to high-quality patient care. Achieving QOPI certification for the author’s cancer center was driven by a nurse-led quality improvement initiative. The result was an official designation that reflects the mission, vision, and philosophy of the organization.

Health care as an industry is more competitive today than ever before. Organizations across the United States are taking steps to demonstrate that they deserve the public’s trust, loyalty, and healthcare dollars. One way for hospital systems to show that they are as good as or better than competitors is to achieve official recognition through specialty certifications and designations. This article describes the experience of the University of California, San Diego, Moores Cancer Center, a National Cancer Institute–designated comprehensive cancer center, in achieving certification through the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Quality Oncology Performance Initiative (QOPI®) Certification Program. The cancer center used an interdisciplinary approach and followed the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) improvement model (Shewhart, 1986) to realize a consistent method for implementing and sustaining change.

Benchmarking Performance in Outpatient Oncology

Benchmarking structure, processes, and outcomes between organizations is a foundational process in healthcare quality assurance. Comparing performance with like organizations lends perspective to data and forms the basis for demonstrating quality for the public in the competitive healthcare market. The QOPI program began awarding certification to outpatient oncology practices in 2010. For more information about certification, visit http://qopi.asco.org/FAQ. Practices become eligible for certification by participating in QOPI, a voluntary program that facilitates benchmarking performance against specific quality metrics in comparison with practices across the United States.

Because of the role of nurses as direct care providers, expert consultants, educators, managers, and administrators, the initiative to achieve QOPI certification was largely driven by nurses in all aspects of quality improvement from writing policy to programming electronic documentation. Frontline nurse managers emerged as the linchpins for the team, and the success of the initiative was largely attributed to their ability to link strategic planning with operational action. Active involvement of direct patient care nurses is essential to successful practice change, and the role of the frontline nurse manager should not be underestimated (Wilson, 2011). Managers