■ CNE Article

Oncology Nurse Navigator Role Delineation Study:
An Oncology Nursing Society Report

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The purpose of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) Oncology Nurse Navigator Role Delineation Study was to examine the job-function activities of the oncology nurse navigator, thus providing an understanding of this unique role. The Role Delineation Advisory Committee consisting mainly of oncology nurse navigators was formed to provide content expertise to Applied Measurement Professionals, which conducted the role delineation study. Three hundred and thirty nurses completed the survey. The study clearly defined tasks, knowledge areas, and skills that are very specific to the nurse navigator role; however, the overlap in knowledge with the general oncology nurse role needs to be explored. The ONS Board of Directors and the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation Board of Directors currently are exploring the need for additional initiatives to help define the role and competencies of the oncology nurse navigator.

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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 OCN® 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 OCN® 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.