



# Implementing a Dedicated Education Unit: A Practice Partnership With Oncology Nurses

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An urgent need exists to identify innovative and evidence-based educational methods to help oncology nurses provide safe and high-quality patient care. One promising solution is the dedicated education unit (DEU) educational model, which partners nursing faculty and skilled nursing clinicians to facilitate the clinical experience of undergraduate baccalaureate nursing students. This article describes the collaborative DEU initiative developed between a university school of nursing and a tertiary cancer center to provide senior nursing students with an innovative method to develop their competencies in oncology nursing practice and care.

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Oncology nursing is a rapidly changing profession because of the increasing complexity of patient care, growing use of sophisticated technological methods, and changing demographics of the nation's population and nursing workforce. Those characteristics support the need for oncology nurses to participate in life-long learning and quality improvement initiatives to ensure safe and high-quality care will be provided to all patients and survivors living with cancer. The significant impact of these trends on the quality of nursing education and the future of healthcare is a major concern in the United States. In fact, a Institute of Medicine (IOM), 2011) report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, noted that new and novel education models that encourage collaborations among communities, healthcare institu-

tions, and business organizations were needed to better equip nurses to deliver high-quality care.

Over time, nursing education has identified numerous models to increase the education, preparation, and availability of baccalaureate-prepared nurses (IOM, 2011; Wurmser & Bliss-Holtz, 2011). One method has been the use of academic-practice partnerships to promote the evidence-based practice needed in oncology nursing (IOM, 2011). This article describes an innovative academic-practice partnership model initiated to develop clinical skills and knowledge of senior nursing students in oncology nursing care. This new approach, the dedicated education unit (DEU), provides a structured environment that integrates academic and clinic practice to enhance the learning experience of future oncology nurses.

## The Innovative Dedicated Education Unit Model

In 1997, the School of Nursing at Flinders University of Australia developed a model to improve undergraduate nurses' clinical education and experience (Edgecombe, Wotton, Gonda, & Mason, 1999). Traditionally, nursing rotations had consisted of short placements in diverse clinical settings and locations. In those rotations, a common role expected of the unit's nursing staff was to teach, support, and supervise novice students. Clinical staff often faced several challenges to fulfilling that role, including limited time and effort, perceptions that nursing faculty did not provide adequate supervision of students in the clinical setting, and inadequate problem-solving skills required of students to increase their knowledge and skills.

To address these challenges and improve nursing education, Flinders University of Australia developed a nursing educational approach (the DEU) designed to provide an optimal teaching-learning clinical environment for nursing students. The model blended evidence-based teaching approaches used by expert nursing faculty with clinical expertise, support, guidance, and role modeling of seasoned nursing staff (Gonda, Wotton, Edgecombe, & Mason, 1999). Clinical instructors assigned to the DEU were charged with planning and supervising student experiences. As part of the partnership, academic faculty developed, implemented, and evaluated the curriculum, in addition to evaluating the students. When needed, the academic faculty worked directly with students and conducted multidisciplinary conferences for students and clinical instructors.