



## The Science and the Future of the Research Track at ONS Congress

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Neil Armstrong planted the first human footprint on the moon in 1969 and declared, “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind” (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2015). That same year, Mary Lasker, socialite and philanthropist, and Sidney Farber, MD, oncologist and research scientist, took a giant leap of faith in a plea to eradicate cancer, placing an advertisement in *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*. The headline proclaimed, “Mr. Nixon: You can cure cancer” (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2015). A statistic in that advertisement revealed that the loss of life to cancer in the past year was 21 times more than of the loss of life in the Vietnam War, a war during which soldiers and field nurses were exposed to Agent Orange, a carcinogen (Beaulieu & Fessele, 2003; West & Leon, 1986). During the war and for many more years to come, oncology nurses were on the front lines of the cancer battle, mixing chemotherapeutic agents without personal protective equipment—not even gloves. Chemotherapy, or “chemical therapy,” had only been developed during World War II in 1942 after the discovery that exposure to mustard gas ablated bone marrow in cells, which was a potential cure for hematopoietic malignancies.

In 1973, as the war on cancer raged on, the American Nursing Association and American Cancer Society sponsored the first National Cancer Nursing Research Conference. In 1975, the same year the Vietnam War ended, the Oncology Nursing Society ([ONS], 2015) was incorporated.

### The Science

Oncology research conducted by nurse scientists and the support of ONS have never wavered. In 1981, the ONS Foundation was established and, to date,

has awarded more than \$24 million in research funding and scholarships. Major contributions to science and practice have included study topics about the prevention of cancer, symptom management, and survivorship, as well as biobehavioral and psychosocial studies. In addition, research on genetics and genomics is part of cutting-edge oncology research, and nurse scientists are once again on the front lines. This is evidenced by the 2014–2018 ONS Research Agenda, which contains eight major focal areas with four cross-cutting themes, including bioinformatics, biomarkers, comparative effectiveness research, and dissemination and implementation science (Knobf et al., 2015). What other nursing organization has such a robust, well-supported, and stimulating Research Agenda?

In 1976, the first ONS Congress was held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The first biennial National Conference on Cancer Nursing Research was held in 1989, featuring top nurse scientists conducting research in oncology, and it continued until 2011, after which the visibility of research at ONS meetings faded away (Phillips & King, 2009). For two years, a combined effort, including the advanced practice nursing meeting and the research conference, was held under the title of the ONS Connections conference. However, the cross-fertilization did not have the intended results. Research ideas are born from clinical practice, and clinical practice is informed by research. In theory, this should have been a success. Perhaps the attendees all felt a loss of their historically unique meetings. Perhaps topics did not knit together properly between the research and practice issues being discussed. Most likely, it was the effect of multiple factors with many unknowns.

When Thomas Edison was working toward inventing the lightbulb, he knew it could be done. Historic records show that it took more than 6,000 experiments

to get a filament-filled bulb of glass to light up (Latson, 2014). Each time an experiment did not work, Edison did not declare that he failed, but that the particular attempt brought him one step closer to finding the answer. Oncology nurse scientists are equally dedicated to their programs of research. Dissemination and live discussions of findings are critical. ONS is now one step closer to finding the best venue for researchers.

### The Future

With the continued conviction that research and practice must communicate and the need for the ONS-supported researchers to be visible at ONS-sponsored meetings, the concept for the research track at ONS Congress emerged. In collaboration with the American Association for Cancer Research and its visionary leader, Margaret Foti, PhD, MD, the research track at the 2015 ONS Congress meeting included hot-topic sessions co-presented by world-renowned nurse scientists. Coupled with support from the ONS Advanced Nursing Research Special Interest Group, the inaugural research track was well received. Presentations by “research celebrities,” such as Christine Miaskowski, RN, PhD, FAAN, Donna Berry, PhD, RN, AOCN®, FAAN, Suzanne Mahon, RN, DNSc, AOCN®, APNG, Deborah Watkins Bruner, RN, PhD, FAAN, Carol Estwing Ferrans, PhD, RN, FAAN, and Karen Meneses, PhD, RN, FAAN, were well received and inspired the audience. In 2016, the research track will include exciting panel discussion sessions with participation by oncology nurse clinician experts in addition to researchers. Such discussions between researchers and

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clinicians are essential for the health and well-being of patients.

## Conclusion

The ground is fertile, and nurses are at an integral time of collaboration in research and practice. With so many advances, many individuals with cancer are seen as having a chronic condition necessitating long-term management. Oncology nurses should push the agenda further and faster toward creating that dreamed-of world without cancer. Please join ONS in taking a giant leap for humankind. See you in 2016 in San Antonio, Texas.

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