

# Providing Novice Navigators With a GPS for Role Development: Oncology Nurse Navigator Competency Project

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**Background:** The care of patients with cancer has evolved to include various lay and professional roles to enhance care coordination with the focus on delivering patient-centered care. Oncology nurses in the role of oncology nurse navigators (ONNs) contribute to the delivery of patient-centered care by guiding patients and families through the cancer continuum and providing resources to overcome system and practical barriers and to enhance psychosocial support and cancer-specific education. However, the role of the ONN is often defined differently depending on the practice setting and institutional policy. The result is an inconsistent assortment of role functions and educational backgrounds.

**Objectives:** This article aims to promote standardization of the role of the ONN as well as the structure and boundaries of how ONNs function.

**Methods:** A project team was established by the Oncology Nursing Society to develop a professional practice framework and to identify core competencies for use by ONNs across a variety of practice settings.

**Findings:** The development of core competencies as well as examples of how the core competencies can be applied to ONN practice will help to define the ONN role and better serve the needs of patients with cancer, their families, and their caregivers.

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Key words: care coordination; role function; practice framework; competency; novice

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/16.CJON.20-01AP

The delivery of cancer care is evolving. Healthcare systems are introducing navigators to care teams in an attempt to reduce cancer mortality by improving access to quality cancer (Freeman, 2009) while acknowledging the need to fulfill American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer (ACOS COC) and National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers standards for accreditation (ACOS, 2014; ACOS COC, 2012). In literature addressing the role of navigators in the oncology setting, navigators have been identified with a variety of titles: patient navigators, care navigators, professional nurse navigator, cancer care navigator,

nurse navigator, and oncology nurse navigator (ONN), among others. This broad assortment of role titles is accompanied by an equally inconsistent assortment of role functions, educational backgrounds, and practice settings.

In 2009, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) recognized the distinctive function of the role of navigators with a think tank meeting. ONS joined with the Association of Oncology Social Work and the National Association of Social Workers to establish a joint position (ONS, 2010b). This position statement supported the importance of the patient navigator role (whether a layperson or professional) in the cancer care setting,