

Oncology nurses are at high risk for burnout and compassion fatigue. Self-care is an essential element that oncology nurses should incorporate into their daily lives but, instead, is often deprioritized. As a result, nurses do not seek out educational opportunities that focus on self-care or personal growth. This article describes the curriculum that was developed for an oncology nurse retreat that promoted self-care and building personal resilience using tools that could be adapted for use with patients and families.

AT A GLANCE

- Oncology nurses do not often attend programs designed to support self-care and promote personal development.
- Practicing self-care is essential, not a luxury, for building personal resilience and being effective at working with others in the healing process.
- Oncology nurses can easily adapt learning tools to support self-care for use with patients and families.

KEYWORDS

compassion fatigue; oncology nursing; self-care; lifestyle

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Oncology Nurse Retreat

A strength-based approach to self-care and personal resilience

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Working with patients with cancer and their families is a gratifying and inspiring experience for nurses who have chosen this profession. Oncology nurses demonstrate a high level of caring through a patient's cancer trajectory that can be complex, uncertain, and often long in duration.

Caring for patients with cancer and their families in vulnerable times is a holistic process requiring physical, mental, and emotional strength from oncology nurses. The intensity of the caring process, with the growing complexity in health care, can create significant stress, which places oncology nurses at risk for negative outcomes if the stress is not attended to in a timely manner (Neville & Cole, 2013).

Oncology nurses regularly encounter moral distress (Pavlish, Brown-Saltzman, Jakel, & Fine, 2014), suffering, terminal diagnoses, mourning, loss, and death (Romeo-Ratliff, 2014; Wenzel, Shaha, Klimmek, & Krumm, 2011). In associating and empathizing with patients with cancer and their families, oncology nurses are challenged with recognizing the reality of their own future death and losses; some have also experienced a personal cancer diagnosis. These issues lead to a high risk for burnout and compassion fatigue (Romeo-Ratliff, 2014; Tog, Ang, & Devi, 2012). Melvin (2015) estimated that 38% of oncology nurses in her study exhibited compassion fatigue. Another study (Hooper, Craig, Janvrin, Wetsel, &

Reimels, 2010) reported that 86% of nurses in multiple specialties, including oncology, experienced moderate to high degrees of burnout and compassion fatigue.

Self-care is important, particularly for caregivers who need the strength, presence, and ability to support not only themselves, but also others in their charge. Oncology nurses instruct and coach patients and families in self-care management and health-promoting behaviors. Intuitively, one may surmise that nurses are good at practicing self-care and are experts at modeling positive health behaviors. However, the reality is that nurses often neglect their own care by putting first the needs of others, including their own families (McElligot, 2013).

When looking for educational opportunities, nurses attend offerings that will enhance their clinical skills or expand their nursing knowledge in ways that will benefit patients and families versus programs that focus on personal growth and development. The purpose of this article is to describe the curriculum that was developed for an oncology nurse retreat that promoted self-care and building personal resilience through experiential learning. To attract nurses, the tools (see Figure 1) experienced in the retreat were made adaptable for later use with patients and families.

Participants and Setting

This retreat was specifically designed for oncology nurses who were facilitators of a 12-week community-based cancer survivorship program for patients and