

Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) members share a unique passion for the people they serve and frequently commit to projects that make a difference. Camp Raising Spirits, a weekend retreat for adults with cancer, has made a difference in southwestern Pennsylvania for hundreds of people with cancer and their caregivers for 24 consecutive years. This article will describe how an ONS chapter capitalized on the leadership attributes of partnership, creativity, and commitment to sustain an important community service program.

AT A GLANCE

- Cancer survivors benefit from opportunities to share experiences of their cancer journey with other survivors and take a break from their diagnosis in a well-supported, stress-free, fun environment.
- ONS chapter members can build leadership skills by participating in community efforts that combine volunteerism with their passion for oncology nursing.
- Partnership, creativity, and commitment are leadership attributes that can promote sustainable outcomes for community projects.

KEYWORDS

oncology nursing; volunteer; leadership; cancer survivorship

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/17.CJON.506-508

Camp Raising Spirits

An Oncology Nursing Society chapter leadership success story

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Volunteer leadership is hard work. The pace of the American lifestyle and efforts to balance work, family, and community needs often create competing demands for precious discretionary time. Dedicated oncology nurses care deeply about their profession yet often struggle to find the extra hours or minutes in the day to engage in activities to support their communities. Engagement in local activities with organizations like the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) provides nurses with an opportunity to give back to their communities and connect with the essence of why they became oncology nurses. This article describes how an ONS chapter capitalized on the passion of its members and the engagement of the oncology community through partnership, creativity, and commitment to sustain a weekend camp for adults with cancer for nearly a quarter of a century.

Background

Early diagnosis of cancer and better treatment options have increased the number of cancer survivors in the United States to more than 15.5 million (American Cancer Society, 2016). Activities to promote wellness and support cancer survivorship have been well described in the literature (Grant, Economou, & Ferrell, 2010; Pergolotti et al., 2017; Walker, Szanton, & Wenzel, 2015). The use of an outdoor camping experience to support cancer

survivors is primarily described in the literature with examples of camps for children and their families. Camping provides children with chronic illnesses, including cancer, the opportunity to engage in fun activities like any other child with the support of medical and nursing staff and other adults (Martiniuk, Silva, Amylon, & Barr, 2014). “The healing power of play” and acceptance were described by children and their families following a camp for pediatric cancer survivors (Laing & Moules, 2016). A multisite evaluation of 19 summer camps for children with cancer and their siblings measured camper well-being and reported high levels of emotional, physical, social, and self-esteem functioning (Wu, McPhail, Mooney, Martiniuk, & Amylon, 2016).

A camping experience to support adults with a cancer diagnosis is not a new phenomenon. Camp Fresh Horizons was established in 1991 by the Western New York ONS chapter as an innovative wellness experience for patients with cancer. A Girl Scouts camp provided indoor accommodations and multiple venues for outdoor activities, including a swimming pool, horseshoe pit, boating facilities, and a lake for adventurous campers. Camper outcomes included “healing through shared illness experiences, reduced social isolation, a sense of community . . . and a feeling of being refreshed” (Wallace, Graham, & Wonch, 1993, p. 1372). The current president of the Western New York chapter noted that, although the program