
Novice Oncology Nurse Navigator

Core elements in establishing training needs and building on competencies

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BACKGROUND: Oncology nurse navigation opportunities are rapidly expanding as the value of the role is recognized. However, there is a lack of training opportunities focusing on the unique needs of the oncology nurse navigator (ONN). Most navigator training programs provide only general oncology navigation content.

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this article is to evaluate the current state of training for the novice ONN and begin to identify core elements to inform development of a standardized training program.

METHODS: Navigator training programs and literature related to the role and development needs of the novice ONN were reviewed.

FINDINGS: Training of the novice ONN varies widely, with little evaluation of the most effective way to prepare for the role. It is clear that the learning needs of the ONN are different than those of other types of navigators and oncology nurses.

KEYWORDS

oncology nurse navigator; training; patient navigation; oncology nurse generalist

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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ONCOLOGY NURSE NAVIGATION IS A RAPIDLY EVOLVING nursing specialty with a growing body of literature documenting the key components of the role and benefits for patient care (Baileys et al., 2018; Freund et al., 2014; McMullen, 2013). The Oncology Nursing Society ([ONS], 2017) describes the oncology nurse navigator (ONN) as an RN who has clinical knowledge specific to oncology and is able to provide personalized assistance to patients, as well as their families and caregivers, in an attempt to surmount healthcare system barriers. In addition, ONNs offer education and resources that assist with the informed decision-making process, as well as timely access to health care and psychosocial care throughout the cancer trajectory (ONS, 2017). However, a foundation to train new ONNs requires well-designed evidence-based studies (Ustjanauskas, Bredice, Nuhaily, Kath, & Wells, 2016). This issue was highlighted at a 2017 National Cancer Policy Forum of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018) workshop titled Establishing Effective Patient Navigation Programs in Oncology, which called for the development of standardized training for oncology nurse navigators.

Although patient navigation is perceived as a relatively new role, it should be viewed from cultural, socioeconomic, and legislative perspectives (Cantril, 2014). Key events set the stage for the recognition of cancer as a specialty and the need for collaborative, coordinated, and comprehensive cancer care (see Figure 1). These milestones provide a historical foundation for cancer nursing, advocacy, and navigation. Patient navigation requires a patient-centered approach focusing on the facilitation of timely and efficient transitions through the stages of the care continuum (Freeman & Rodriguez, 2011; Peart, Lewis, Brown, & Russell, 2018). This requires the coordination of care across a complex healthcare system. Patients require navigation not just within but across healthcare organizations, such as among primary, ambulatory, disease-specific, and tertiary care settings. Therefore, the core function of patient navigation is to eliminate barriers that inhibit access to care and promote transitions between settings and providers. This core function is best accomplished by a navigator working one-on-one with the patient (Freeman & Rodriguez, 2011; Peart et al., 2018).

To ensure that navigation services are cost effective, it is essential that a scope of practice be defined that distinguishes navigators from other