



The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the health and well-being of individuals and communities worldwide. Patients with cancer are particularly vulnerable to experiencing serious health-related suffering from COVID-19. This requires oncology nurses in inpatient and clinic settings to ensure the delivery of primary palliative care while considering the far-reaching implications of this public health crisis. With palliative care skills fully integrated into oncology nursing practice, health organizations and cancer centers will be better equipped to meet the holistic needs of patients with cancer and their families receiving care for serious illness, including improved attention to physical, psychosocial, cultural, spiritual, and ethical considerations.

AT A GLANCE

- Palliative care is an integral component of comprehensive cancer care throughout the illness trajectory.
- COVID-19 has increased the burden of serious health-related suffering for patients with cancer, requiring enhanced primary palliative oncology nursing skills.
- Oncology nurses should integrate primary palliative care skills while considering the myriad psychosocial, physical, and spiritual consequences of COVID-19.

KEYWORDS

primary palliative care; quality of life; COVID-19; pandemic; end-of-life care

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Primary Palliative Care Clinical Implications

Oncology nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The COVID-19 crisis is having profound consequences on the integrity of healthcare delivery and the nursing workforce around the world. Resource constraints, ethical dilemmas, spiritual and existential distress, increased visibility of health inequities, and social isolation are just some of the issues affecting patient, family, caregiver, and palliative care-related outcomes (Abedi et al., 2020; Dawson et al., 2020; Emanuel et al., 2020; Ferrell et al., 2020; Marmot, 2020; Morley et al., 2020). Patients with cancer are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and at increased risk for serious symptomatic complications and rapid physical decline (Mehta et al., 2020). In addition, there are a number of factors that may influence oncology nurses' care of patients with cancer in the context of COVID-19, including the stage and aggressiveness of the patient's cancer, the availability of resources for care (e.g., personal protective equipment, staffing, medications), increasing COVID-19-related anxiety, and the management of cancer amid an overwhelmed healthcare system.

The purpose of this article is to equip clinical oncology nurses working in all settings with primary palliative care skills during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC, 2020a) is an international palliative care education initiative that has empowered more than one million nurses globally with palliative care skills and competencies. This article provides an evidence-based resource for primary palliative oncology nursing created by an ELNEC task force in response to the pandemic.

Palliative Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The increasing global prevalence of COVID-19 and associated deaths have called urgent attention to the critical nature of integrating palliative care throughout the healthcare continuum (De Lima et al., 2020; Radbruch et al., 2020). Palliative care is a critical component of high-quality health care, and access to it has become more significant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Available, affordable, accessible, and culturally acceptable health care is a right of all individuals, regardless of financial, social, political, geographic, racial, religious, or other considerations (American Nurses Association [ANA], 2016; International Council of Nurses, 2011; Knaul et al., 2018). Universal palliative care access is recognized as a core aspect of universal health coverage (World Health Organization, 2014, 2019).