Defining the Role of the Nurse in Population-Based Cancer Screening Programs: A Literature Review

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Nurses are pivotal in cancer prevention and early detection, but the nurse’s role in cancer screening programs has been described only in very general terms without specification of activities needed to develop the role. To identify the set of activities that compose the role of the cancer-screening nurse, the authors of the current article performed a critical descriptive literature review to document nursing involvement in cancer screening, covering articles published from 2000–2012. A total of 726 potentially relevant studies were identified, and 22 of those were included in the review. Nurses carry out follow-up, coordinate treatment, ensure continuity throughout the process, provide up-to-date and pertinent information to facilitate patient knowledge and choice, work to ensure coordination among the various levels of care, provide ongoing training, lead research and publications concerning daily practice, and collaborate in investigation oriented toward early detection. The literature revealed that the nurse’s role in cancer screening involves case management as the main activity as well as, exceptionally, carrying out diagnostic tests.