

The Role of Licensed Nursing Personnel in Radiation Oncology Part A: Results of a Descriptive Study

Giselle J. Moore-Higgs, ARNP, MSN, AOCN®, Deborah Watkins-Bruner, RN, PhD,
Laura Balmer, RN, MS, ANP, Janice Johnson-Doneski, RN, BSN, OCN®,
Paulette Komarny, RN, BSN, OCN®, RT(T), Beatrice Mautner, RN, MSN, OCN®,
and Karima Velji, RN, MSc, AOCN®, PhD(c)

Purpose/Objectives: To identify the specific administrative, clerical, patient care, patient education, and research responsibilities that licensed nursing personnel perform in the field of radiation oncology.

Design: Descriptive.

Sample: 281 licensed nursing personnel employed in the field of radiation oncology in North America.

Methods: Subjects completed a six-page, self-administered questionnaire comprised of fixed-choice and open-ended questions.

Main Research Variables: Demographics, employment settings, and administrative, clerical, patient care, patient education, and research responsibilities.

Findings: Nurses in radiation oncology tend to be older (41–60 years of age) and considerably well educated, with many years of experience in this field. Nurses are responsible for a wide variety of tasks. The study found a strong demonstration of the role of nurse educator among radiation oncology nurses.

Implications for Nursing: Radiation oncology nursing is a subspecialty in evolution. The data should provide support for further exploration of how patient education and support influence patient outcomes in radiation oncology.

Key Points . . .

- Staff nurses in radiation oncology have a wide variety of administrative, clerical, patient care, and research responsibilities within their departments.
- Patient education was identified as a very important role of nurses in radiation oncology.
- The overall aging of the nursing workforce in the United States is reflected in radiation oncology, raising the concern of significant shortages in radiation oncology nurses in the near future.

and private practice radiation oncology centers. The primary goal of the subcommittee was to describe the current roles and responsibilities of licensed nursing personnel working in the

Across North America, the role of licensed nursing personnel (licensed practical nurses, RNs, and advanced practice nurses [APNs]) in the field of radiation oncology has not been clear. Informal discussions at national and local meetings have made evident that nurses may be underutilized or that determination of their role may be subject to non-nursing supervisors. To date, a paucity of nursing literature has described the role, with which job descriptions for new positions can be developed or current roles further enhanced. With significant advances in radiation technology resulting in more patients receiving radiation therapy (RT) with curative intent, the role of licensed nurses in the field has grown. It also has the potential for substantial expansion in the near future as patients are given more options for treatment with new approaches to brachytherapy, intensity-modulated procedures, proton beam programs, and nonmalignant disease protocols.

To address this issue, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) RT Special Interest Group (RT SIG) established a subcommittee comprised of RNs and APNs who worked in both academic

Giselle J. Moore-Higgs, ARNP, MSN, AOCN®, is coordinator of clinical programs and a nurse practitioner in the Department of Radiation Oncology at the University of Florida in Gainesville; Deborah Watkins-Bruner, RN, PhD, is an associate member of Population Science and Radiation Oncology and director of the Prostate Cancer Risk Assessment Program, Systems and Outcomes Research, at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia, PA; Laura Balmer, RN, MS, ANP, is a radiation oncology nurse practitioner at Associated Radiologists of the Finger Lakes, P.C., Falck Cancer Center, in New York; Janice Johnson-Doneski, RN, BSN, OCN®, is nurse manager of the outpatient oncology department at Mount Auburn Hospital in Waltham, MA; Paulette Komarny, RN, BSN, OCN®, RT(T), is a radiation oncology nurse in the Arlington Hospital Department of Radiation Oncology in Virginia; Beatrice Mautner, RN, MSN, OCN®, is clinical practice coordinator at Valley Radiotherapy Associates Medical Group in Chatsworth, CA; and Karima Velji, RN, MSc, AOCN®, PhD(c), is vice president of professional practice and chief nursing officer at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute in Canada. This project was funded by a grant from the Oncology Nursing Society Special Interest Groups. (Submitted October 2001. Accepted for publication May 15, 2002.)

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/03.ONF.51-58