

Explicit Assumptions About Knowing

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Conceptual Foundations is a new column for *Oncology Nursing Forum (ONF)* that focuses on the frameworks that underpin research and practice initiatives. The purpose of this inaugural column is to provide an overview of what conceptual frameworks are, related terms, the role of conceptual frameworks in the research process, and why these frameworks matter. The majority of articles published in *ONF* are research manuscripts. Readers include student nurses, practicing oncology nurses, nurse managers, advanced practice oncology nurses, nurse scientists, and people in other disciplines who are interested in patients with cancer. In the guidelines for *ONF* articles, peer reviewers are asked to address the conceptual model/theory (if needed) that is included in the manuscript. For all who read, apply, and create knowledge, understanding the conceptual framework underlying a research study is an essential skill to master. The conceptual framework may be explicitly identified by the author or may be implicit. If not specifically stated, the reader must detect the underlying assumptions that form a conceptual foundation.

Definitions and Related Terms

What is a conceptual framework? *Concept* is defined as “an abstract or generic idea generalized from

particular instances” (“Concept,” n.d., para. 1). *Framework* is defined as “the basic structure of something: a set of ideas or facts that provide support for something” or “a supporting structure” (“Framework,” n.d., para. 1). Taken together, a *conceptual framework* consists of specified abstract ideas that are joined in an identified structure. Conceptual frameworks identify what is important in understanding a phenomenon and provide guidance for relationships. No universally accepted definition exists for conceptual framework, and the term is sometimes used interchangeably with conceptual model, theoretical framework, and theory (Powers & Knapp, 2011).

Many terms are related to conceptual frameworks (see Table 1). *Epistemology* is a branch of philosophy that studies “how we know” and the justification of knowledge claims. Varying epistemologic philosophic traditions have emphasized different aspects and views of knowledge, certainty, and truth, and have provided differing interpretations of theory and concepts. Empirical philosophic traditions influence much of the current research and emphasize the systematic observation of reality through sensory observation (Powers & Knapp, 2011). *Worldview* refers to a general orientation or set of beliefs about how the world operates. *Paradigm*, a term coined by philosopher Thomas Kuhn,