

Implementing an Oncology Nurse Practitioner Fellowship: Reflections and Lessons Learned

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As oncology nurse practitioner (NP) fellowships expand across the United States, institutions note improved transitions to specialty practice and better patient outcomes. These fellowships may further serve as a strategy to address provider shortages, as well as improve retention and prevent burnout. This article provides key lessons learned from a three-year oncology NP fellowship program at an academic comprehensive cancer center.

AT A GLANCE

- Demonstrating the financial benefits of an NP fellowship ensures allocated resources and support.
- Collaboration among advanced practice leadership, fellowship directors, and coordinators streamlines communication and directs placement of the fellow's clinical rotations.
- Reflection and adaptability of the NP fellowship program may foster improvements to incorporate in subsequent years.

KEYWORDS

nurse practitioner fellowship; advanced practice nurse; transition to practice

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Across the United States, the need for complex cancer treatments and providers to care for a growing oncology population is rising (Yang et al., 2014). As patients live longer and aging oncology specialists retire, the demand for oncology specialty providers within inpatient and outpatient settings has also increased (Jackson & Hande, 2021). Nurse practitioners (NPs) are essential to ensure an adequate supply of oncology providers. However, specialty training is needed for clinical competency and skill in cancer care following completion of graduate programs and board certification (Hande et al., 2022). Given the vast number of specialties within a cancer care center, NP fellowships provide one year of didactic and clinical training to support the transition from generalist to specialist as an oncology provider (Kramer & Valente, 2020). This article reviews lessons learned from leaders of an oncology NP fellowship within an academic comprehensive cancer center. Reflections from the program's three cohorts may inform improvement strategies and provide guidance for other specialty NP fellowships.

Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center NP Fellowship Program

The division of hematology-oncology at the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center (VICC) in Nashville, Tennessee, supported initiation of an NP fellowship program in 2018. Conception and development of this program was presented by faculty NPs who identified a gap in oncology NP fellowships on a national and regional level (Alencar et al., 2018; Hande et al., 2022). This gap frequently delayed transition to practice within VICC, often resulting in staffing shortages for inpatient and outpatient teams. Parallel to established physician hematology-oncology fellowships, this NP fellowship program served to successfully transition new graduates into specialized cancer treatment provider roles (Jackson & Hande, 2021; Thommassen, 2018).

During a one-year period, NP fellows participate in assigned hematology-oncology curricula, complete 1,500 hours of clinical immersion, develop their professional role with the fellowship coordinator, and explore scholarly dissemination of advanced practice provider (APP) teamwork. The fellowship coordinator is a doctoral-prepared NP who also holds professorship in the Vanderbilt University School of Nursing. The Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) also employs a director of advanced practice fellowships