

Bridging the Gap: Standardizing Orientation to Improve Vacancy and Turnover Rates of Ambulatory Oncology Nurses

Christina M. Matousek, MSN, RN, OCN®



This article describes standardizing ambulatory oncology nursing orientation within an academic comprehensive cancer center to reduce turnover rates. The nursing professional development specialist created a standardized orientation using templates to ensure consistency and disease-specific experiences because this center is organized into 17 interprofessional disease teams.

AT A GLANCE

- Ambulatory oncology care is complex, requiring multifaceted nursing roles.
- Poor onboarding is associated with increased turnover and reduced retention of nursing staff.
- Using a standardized orientation can help reduce turnover and vacancy in ambulatory oncology.

KEYWORDS

orientation; oncology nursing; clinics; ambulatory; standardization; onboarding

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The care of patients with cancer, which has historically been provided in the acute care setting, shifted to ambulatory care beginning in the 1990s because of technological innovations, financial incentives, and patient preference (Abrams et al., 2018). The demand for ambulatory oncology nurses has since increased, with 80% of all cancer care being provided in the outpatient setting (Hubbard & DeMeyer, 2022). Within ambulatory care, the nursing roles are multifaceted and require collaboration with the interprofessional team and independent critical thought (American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing, n.d.). Nursing roles in ambulatory settings can be ambiguous and, without proper role clarification, may make the transition from acute to ambulatory care a challenging experience.

Although most nurses entering ambulatory settings have experience, ambulatory care requires a unique set of attributes that some experienced nurses may find difficult to attain. The American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (n.d.) states that the scope of ambulatory nursing includes care coordination, transition management, and telehealth. Ambulatory nurses need to have strong critical thinking skills, sound clinical judgment, and the ability to implement the nursing process in patients who may not be under their direct care. Proper ambulatory nursing training ensures that nurses can provide the same level of care that was historically delivered in the acute setting (Pirschel, 2019).

Evidence highlights that the development of ambulatory nursing orientation is a key component to ensuring competent care (Andronico et al., 2019; Fischer, 2022; Hampton et al., 2020; Kiel, 2020; Lambson & Dalton, 2022; Page, 2022; Vadivelu, 2020; Ward et al., 2022). Hampton et al. (2020), Page (2022), and Vadivelu (2020) reported on how poor onboarding can negatively affect retention and turnover. Feedback from staff revealed a lack of consistency with preceptors and the orientation to their roles, leading to decreased confidence in their practices (Page, 2022).

Research suggests that using a standardized orientation can positively affect retention and turnover rates, particularly in ambulatory settings