

# ONCOLOGY NURSING SOCIETY POSITION



## Psychosocial Care and Services for Patients With Cancer and Their Families

Patients with cancer and their families may experience a variety of psychosocial problems along the cancer continuum. Anxiety, denial, suffering, loss, grief, and other psychosocial problems affect patients' coping, adaptation, treatment, and recovery. Many components of daily life, such as the ability to engage in self-care, work or attend school, or establish and maintain interpersonal relationships may be negatively affected when psychosocial problems are not addressed. Unresolved psychosocial issues ultimately may reduce patients' quality of life (Carroll-Johnson, Gorman, & Bush, 2006).

A variety of psychosocial interventions and services can effectively address problems caused or intensified by cancer as well as those that result from a lack of information or skills needed to manage a cancer diagnosis, its treatment, and survivorship (Carroll-Johnson et al., 2006). Unfortunately, the ability to meet patients' and families' psychosocial health needs may be the exception rather than the rule. Healthcare providers do not routinely assess psychosocial health needs and patients and families often are unaware of available psychosocial resources. The Institute of Medicine's (2007) report, *Cancer Care for the Whole Patient: Meeting Psychosocial Needs*, documented that the problem is not the lack of psychosocial services, but rather the lack of an organized proactive approach that links healthcare providers and patients to available evaluation, education, interventions, and delivery approaches.

### It Is the Position of ONS That

- Psychosocial assessment is an essential component of cancer care and part of the oncology nurse's role in delivering quality cancer care.
- Every patient with cancer and their family has access to psychosocial care.
- Oncology nurses in collaboration with other healthcare providers identify each patient's psychosocial needs, design and implement a plan that links the patient with needed psychosocial services, engage and support the patient in this plan, and systematically monitor, document, and revise the patient's psychosocial plan of care.
- Oncology nurses, advocacy organizations, and others inform patients that they should expect, and request when necessary, cancer care that includes a range of psychosocial services such as counseling, education, self-care programs, and support groups.
- Oncology nurses incorporate existing evidence-based psychosocial assessments, interventions, and resources into practice, such as those that are available from the Oncology Nursing Society and other nursing and healthcare organizations.
- Health insurance plans adequately support and pay for evidence-based psychosocial services for patients with cancer that are provided by oncology nurses and other healthcare providers.

- Researchers develop standardized, easy-to-use psychosocial assessment tools and conduct demonstration and evaluation projects of psychosocial interventions and delivery approaches.
- Institutional, local, state, and federal funding is provided to support clinical services and research focused on the development of performance measures for psychosocial care.
- Standard-setting organizations create oversight mechanisms to ensure that psychosocial care and services are being delivered to patients with cancer throughout the care continuum.
- Institutions, agencies, and organizations monitor and evaluate delivery of psychosocial care and services in cancer care.

### References

- Carroll-Johnson, R.M., Gorman, L.M., & Bush, N.J. (Eds.). (2006). *Psychosocial nursing care along the cancer continuum* (2nd ed.). Pittsburgh, PA: Oncology Nursing Society.
- Institute of Medicine. (2007). *Cancer care for the whole patient: Meeting psychosocial health needs*. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from <http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3809/34252/47228.aspx>

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