

2009–2013 Oncology Nursing Society Research Agenda: Why Is It Important?

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The 2009–2013 Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) Research Agenda is available in this issue (see page 514), spearheading the next set of priorities for ONS members to consider in their research and practice. Since 2001, ONS has released an agenda not only for its members but also for agencies concerned with cancer care, allowing researchers to expand on what ONS members find important to nursing knowledge. The 2009–2013 ONS Research Agenda provides new direction for the membership for contributing to nursing science and fostering high-quality and safe care for patients with cancer.

Advances in cancer care, resulting from discoveries in chemoprevention, genetics, molecular biology, supportive care, and changes in healthcare systems, require vital contributions from nursing research. Those contributions inform the research that can be translated into practice; some of the information derived from past agendas has already been applied in the field, helping to transform cancer care for patients and practitioners. The vision of ONS is to lead that transformation by providing clinicians and researchers with a resource for guidance in the field of oncology nursing and patient care, and we must work our changes around the ONS vision to meet the needs of the patients.

History

In 2001, hoping to establish itself as a professional organization committed to setting priorities for research needed for practice and high-quality care, ONS convened a project team to devise a three- to five-year research agenda. Before ONS had a research agenda intact,

the Society often supported projects without basing them on gaps in the knowledge. Because no agenda existed for guidance for funding, pharmaceutical companies often set the direction for projects. Since the project team's inception, ONS releases an updated

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research agenda about every four years. The agenda is developed in conjunction with results from a survey distributed to ONS members as well as a review of the state of the science and consensus-forming panels.

ONS had been disseminating the Research Priorities Survey but had not used it to guide funding or strategic decisions prior to 2001. Priority areas for the agenda are set through the results of that survey, which is completed every four years, reviewing other funding agencies' priorities and state of the science as the research agenda group meets to select the areas for the updated agenda and sets the newest priorities. The survey helps to identify gaps in the knowledge base for oncology nursing practice, oncology nursing research experts, clinical experts, and patient advocates, and assesses current practice and research knowledge needs, integrating this information into the agenda. Together, the data that are grounded in practice are used to consider the survey

priorities and the state of current science, determining what knowledge is needed to improve quality care in oncology nursing.

Purpose

The research agenda was developed to identify key areas of science in which ONS can take a supporting role through funding and articulation to other funding agencies' research needs for the care of patients with cancer. With broad distribution and its contribution to the vision and mission of the organization, the ONS Research Agenda can increase the knowledge base for oncology nursing practice through nursing research priority areas, identify areas to prepare future oncology nursing researchers, and provide evidence-based information to clinical nurses as critical consumers of research findings that can then be applied to practice.

Nurses must continue to understand the consequences of care, intended and unintended. We need to understand how nursing care should be altered to stay current with new treatment modalities. Nurses need innovative ways to improve the quality and safety of care and meet the needs of patients with cancer. The research agenda is a beacon of knowledge to guide us toward solutions for those concerns. Patients with cancer continue to have many unmet needs, and our knowledge base for practice must be strengthened and fortified to meet those needs. An important example of the value of nursing science for ONS members has been the development and wide dissemination of the ONS Putting Evidence Into Practice cards and, now, the book, *Putting Evidence Into Practice: Improving Oncology*

Patient Outcomes (Eaton & Tipton, 2009). This work demonstrates how researchers and practitioners can partner to provide evidence for care.

ONS research activity must be accessible beyond ONS so that other groups are aware of the priorities for patient care. Research grant proposals often cite the ONS Research Agenda to argue for the significance and potential impact of their studies, such as ones submitted to the National Institute for Nursing Research, the National Cancer Institute, and National Research Service Awards (doctoral training fellowships). This lends credence to the influence of the research agenda.

Together, ONS and the external research community of scholars can seek to acquire and apply the knowledge to deliver evidence-based, high-quality cancer care. Because the ultimate goal of research is to identify interventions to influence nursing-sensitive patient outcomes, partnership between research and practice is crucial. The agenda provides the bridge to fuse those two areas, in effect equipping researchers with the tools to unearth improved approaches to cancer care.

Impact

Since 2001, the ONS Research Agenda has guided work for programs of research

funding for small and large grants. For any professional organization, research agendas are relevant for clinicians, researchers, and, most importantly, patients and their families. The new agenda should provide strategies and direction on efforts and resources for the next few years as researchers seek knowledge for the development of evidence for clinical practice.

President Barack Obama underscored the value of nursing research with his 2009 stimulus package, allocating more funding for the National Institute of Nursing Research. Through the effective use of the ONS Research Agenda, we can continue to develop an evidence base for clinical practice as the national healthcare system reforms and accommodates U.S. citizens. The 2009–2013 ONS Research Agenda can serve as a roadmap for our knowledge innovation, promote the integration of new scientific information and technology into existing and emerging roles of oncology nursing, and promote a coordinated effort to ensure high-quality cancer care. The research agenda pinpoints key areas of science in which ONS can take a leadership role in supporting the advancement of oncology nursing science.

Conclusion

Research agendas providing direction for research and the subsequent

evidence will assist nurses, patients, state and national healthcare organizations, regulators, and insurers, paving the way for evidence-based nursing interventions that result in safer, more efficient patient care. Research that guides practice will ultimately produce enhanced care delivered to patients and their families, thus achieving the ONS strategic goal to “drive quality oncology care through clinical practice, research, education, and policy.” The research agenda is a value not only to each member of ONS but to patients with cancer and their families as we design and implement our research and then disseminate the findings for the care they need.

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Reference

Eaton, L.H., & Tipton, J.M. (2009). *Putting evidence into practice: Improving oncology patient outcomes*. Pittsburgh, PA: Oncology Nursing Society.