



## **Professional development of Canadian nurses involved in cancer care (August 2015)**

### **CANO/ACIO Position**

- All Canadians living with or at risk for cancer are entitled to receive care from nurses across all practice settings who possess foundational oncology knowledge, skill and judgment.
- Nurses working in cancer care settings require specialized knowledge, skill and judgment. Post-basic oncology nursing education programs assist nurses to acquire the specialized knowledge and competencies required to provide care in cancer settings.
- Lifelong learning enhances continuing competence and contributes to both high quality patient outcomes and evidence-informed practice.
- Cancer care settings and organizations play a fundamental part in supporting nurses with professional development by providing equitable and accessible resources to promote lifelong learning. Such resources may include, but not limited to the development of mentorship programs and various activities to promote learning (e.g., space, time and resources).

### **Rationale**

Core values of CANO/ACIO which support the professional growth of nurses include:

- The specialty of oncology nursing is an essential component of health care services across the cancer control spectrum (2013).
- Personal and professional development and lifelong learning is essential for nurses to optimally care for people at risk for/ diagnosed with cancer and their families.
- Evidence-informed care is the foundation for excellence in nursing.

CANO/ACIO's (2013) mission is to advance oncology nursing practice, education, research and leadership to improve the lives of all Canadians at risk for/diagnosed with cancer. CANO/ACIO's Standards of Care (CANO/ACIO 2001 & 2015) outline the nursing care to which all Canadians are entitled. Practice standards outline the necessary knowledge and skill that nurses should demonstrate to achieve the Standards of Care. To further CANO/ACIO's mission and support nurses to achieve CANO/ACIO's Standards of Care, CANO/ACIO provides direction for development of the knowledge, skill and judgment needed by nurses to care for people living with cancer.

The demand for high quality, outcomes focused cancer care in Canada requires nurses in all settings to develop competencies in oncology practice. Nurses, as



lifelong learners, recognize the limits of their competency and only perform activities for which they have demonstrated competency. CANO/ACIO acknowledges Benner's (1984) five levels of competency: (a) novice, (b) advanced beginner, (c) competent, (d) proficient and (e) expert. In doing so, CANO/ACIO believes that nurses may practice at various levels at the same time. For example, a nurse with expertise in radiation therapy may encounter a new treatment that then requires the nurse to learn at a novice level until knowledge, judgment and skills enable progression to the expert level. In addition, CANO/ACIO recognizes that having mentorship support also plays an important role in nurses' professional development.

Currently, educational preparation for nurses varies across Canada and many undergraduate programs lack oncology curriculum. Given the prevalence of cancer across all healthcare settings, entry-level competence to practice within ambulatory care settings is critical (Cancer Care Ontario, 2009; Watson, Mooney, & Peterson, 2007). Nurses require oncology specific knowledge and skill in order to provide whole person care as individuals move within complex healthcare systems. The inclusion of oncology curriculum within undergraduate nursing programs will assist nurses to develop the foundational competencies required (Lockhart, 2013; Volker, 2011; Ferrell, 2003; Sarna, 1995) to achieve the Standards of Care to which all Canadians living with cancer are entitled.

Entry-level nursing education programs are not designed to prepare nurses for the complexity of nursing in specialized cancer care settings. New graduates and nurses without oncology knowledge and skill often practice in settings where they are responsible for the care of people with cancer (CANO/ACIO, 2010; Echtenkamp & McMath, n.d.). With the continuing expansion of oncology knowledge, it is essential to prepare nurses for the complexities of practice via access to ongoing educational opportunities (Echtenkamp & McMath, n.d.; Gibson & Soanes, 2000; ISNCC, 2013; ONS, 2013).

The field of oncology and the role(s) of oncology nurses are constantly evolving. It is essential that nurses are adaptable and committed to lifelong learning, building knowledge of cancer populations, the health care system and advances in treatment and technology to ensure the delivery of the best possible cancer care.

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### **Approval by CANO/ACIO Board**

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