



## EONS NEWS

## Modified Delphi Survey establishes EONS research agenda until 2011

Professor Davina Porock, Chair of EONS research committee outlined arrangements for the distribution of research grants totalling €100,000 at the EONS Advisory Council meeting in September 2006. These will be used to pump-prime a variety of projects arising from a research priorities survey conducted by the research committee. The results of the modified Delphi survey revealed that the development of clinical guidelines and care pathways, research into symptom management and the psychological needs of cancer patients are the core concerns of European oncology nurses, and these will form the basis of EONS research strategy for the next five years.

The first survey of research priorities for European oncology nursing was conducted in 2001 using a modified Delphi technique (Browne et al., 2002) which ensures the systematic solicitation, collation and refinement of expert opinion in order to reach consensus on a particular topic (Delbecq et al., 1975). The method is particularly useful when opinions are being sought from participants over a wide geographical area since it ensures that the final outcome represents a synthesis of opinion without the need for participants to necessarily meet in the same place. During the survey, competing priorities are ranked and lesser priorities excluded from subsequent rounds until consensus is reached on the final outcomes or priorities. Round 1 of the survey consisted of an EONS research priorities questionnaire sent to individual members of EONS by email. The Presidents of national oncology nursing societies were also asked to distribute them to their members, and questionnaires were also included in the conference pack for the 2006 EONS Spring Convention with a request that it only be completed once by study participants. Questionnaires asked participants to list their 5 priority research topics for cancer care in addition to demographic data, and these were returned to the EONS secretariat by post or email, whilst those from the convention were returned with conference evaluation forms to the conference secretariat.

A total of 125 questionnaires were returned including 100 from the spring convention. Participants represented 25 countries and had an average of 13.8 years oncology experience (SD 8 yrs, range 0.5–35 yrs). Educational qualifications included 16 diplomas or 'associate degrees', 22

bachelor's degrees; 24 master's degrees, and 19 doctoral degrees whilst 14 listed an unspecified postgraduate award and 30 did not identify the level of their educational attainment. Participants came primarily from inpatient care areas (53) followed by those from schools of nursing/universities (26) and outpatient areas (21). Most worked in medical oncology (47) followed by surgical oncology (14), education (13) research (9) palliative care (8), radiotherapy (4) and bone marrow transplantation (4). Thirty-three responses from the spring convention contained conference feedback or ideas for future content rather than research priorities as requested, so these were excluded from the study leaving a total of 438 researchable topics or an average of 4.3 topics per participant.

After coding, sixty-five research themes were identified from the first round of the study including nurse education, nursing roles, multidisciplinary working, communication, survivorship, quality of life, supportive and palliative care, family experience of a cancer diagnosis, complementary and alternative therapies, pain and symptom management, the management of oral chemotherapy, nurse-education, psycho-oncology and the development and use of clinical guidelines which all scored ten or more in round one of the survey. Twenty-four representatives from nineteen national oncology nursing societies attending the EONS Advisory Council meeting in Brussels during September 2006 were then asked to select their priority topics from a randomly ordered list of these themes for round two of the study, and the highest ranking of these were then submitted to the 16 remaining Advisory Council members on day two of the meeting for a third stage of deliberation. The scores from this third stage ranged from 65 to 90 (from a possible range of 16–144) indicating that there was not a clear consensus of opinion as to the three most important research topics although subsequent discussion resulted in the three highest ranking topics being selected as the society's research priorities for the next five years. These were: the development and evaluation of clinical guidelines and care pathways, symptom management and psycho-oncology.

Symptom management consistently ranks highly when identifying cancer research priorities and the EONS modified

Delphi survey clearly supports the need for continued research in this area. Psychosocial issues, including quality of life, have also ranked highly in previous surveys, but one striking difference between this survey and others is the pre-eminence given by European cancer nurses to the development and evaluation of clinical guidelines and care pathways since this topic has not ranked highly in previous surveys and suggests a seed-change in opinion on this issue. It would appear that whilst the need to expand the evidence base for cancer nursing practice is clearly recognised, there is also now a desire for the findings of such studies to be made readily available to those in practice in the form of clinical guidelines and care pathways which are themselves evaluated in relation to their efficacy, reliability and validity. The study also emphasises the growing importance of systematic reviews and meta-analyses when analysing the importance of nursing research given that many nursing studies lack statistical power and practice needs therefore, to be based upon a synthesis of the available evidence.

It is acknowledged however; that low initial response rates to the emailed questionnaire and an over-reliance on data derived from the spring convention and advisory council meetings may bias the results of the study towards the views of the more senior nurses able to participate in international meetings of this kind. Furthermore, a large number of participants at the spring convention clearly misunderstood the purpose of the questionnaire although this is not surprising given the wide disparity in the use and fluency of English amongst European cancer nurses. Notwithstanding these limitations, it has been suggested that nurses attending such meetings are more likely to possess the insight and expertise to determine priorities for their speciality, group or organisation (McIlfatrick and Keeney, 2003), and the EONS executive board has subsequently allocated a substantial budget to establish a new research funding framework based upon these priorities for the next five years. EONS would like to thank all those who participated in the survey and will announce guidelines and details of the application process for EONS research grants early in 2007.

## Educational developments

During the Advisory Council meeting, EONS' President-elect, Dr. Sara Faithfull also outlined the development of several new educational initiatives including the Facilitation of Cancer Education and Teaching (FaCET) package designed to encourage implementation of the society's 2005 Post-basic Curriculum in Cancer Nursing, plans for the development of a new Breathing and Respiratory Education Training for Health Care Professionals (BREATHE) e-learning project as well as the provision of grants to national oncology nursing societies for the translation of the post-basic and cancer in the elderly curricula. Development of the FaCET package will commence with a training needs analysis in June 2007 and will be followed by the development of distance learning materials by an international panel of experts as well as a training programme for those involved in the implementation of the project. Other projects being considered for the future include the development of separate curricula for breast care, supportive and palliative

care, rehabilitation, surgical oncology and bone marrow transplantation. Dr. Faithfull also announced new cost bandings and a simplification of the applications procedure for those seeking EONS accreditation of short courses, conferences and study days which continue to make up a great deal of the education group and validation panel's work.

## TITAN: gaining global interest!

Interest in EONS' Training in Thrombocytopenia and Neutropenia (TITAN) courses continues to grow within Europe and further afield with the recent completion of a successful course in Australia and coverage of the TITAN programme by the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) in the United States. Courses planned for the remainder of 2006 include those in Germany, Iceland, Italy and Turkey whilst recent courses have proved as popular as ever and continue to be evaluated highly by the course participants. More information about TITAN courses including the most recent TITAN newsletter can be found on the TITAN zone on the EONS website at [www.cancerworld.org/EONS](http://www.cancerworld.org/EONS)

Submissions are also now being invited from TITAN course organisers for the 2006 TITAN Dissemination Project Award. Projects eligible for this award will have been completed between October 2005 and October 2006 and nominations will be judged by an international panel of nurse experts in the spring of 2007. The winning project will be presented to delegates at the European Cancer Conference (ECCO 14) in Barcelona, Spain in September 2007 and nominations should be submitted to the EONS Secretariat no later than Friday, March 31st 2007. Further information about the nomination process can be obtained from the TITAN zone on the EONS website, [www.cancerworld.org/EONS](http://www.cancerworld.org/EONS)

## EONS members honoured

EONS member Anita Margulies has recently become the first nurse to be honoured by the Swiss Cancer League for her contribution to cancer patient care over the course of a remarkable 37 year career as a nurse, educator and cancer patient advocate. The award, given to individuals who have demonstrated exceptional engagement with the needs of cancer patients and cancer prevention recognises her pioneering work in the development of numerous patient education resources, standards and guidelines for the Swiss Oncology Nursing Society and her co-authorship of the authoritative German text, '*Onkologische Krankenpflege*'—already in its fourth edition. Anita, who originates from New York in the USA works in the ambulatory unit and polyclinic for oncology at the University Hospital of Zurich and is an active member of both EONS and the Swiss Oncology Nursing Society.

In the meantime, two past presidents of EONS have received individual recognition from the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) for their contributions to cancer patient care. Nora Kearney, Professor of Cancer Care at the University of Stirling's Cancer Care Research Centre (Scotland) has been awarded the ONS Excellence in Care of the Older Adult with Cancer award whilst EONS' immediate past president Jan Foubert from Belgium is the proud recipient of the society's

2007 International Award for Contributions to Cancer Care. Nora and Jan will be presented with their awards at the ONS Annual Congress in Las Vegas this year and all three EONS members are warmly congratulated on their splendid achievements by the EONS board.

### **EONS Distinguished Merit Award: call for nominations**

Nominations are now invited for the 2007 EONS Distinguished Merit Award to be presented at the next European Cancer Conference (ECCO 14) in Barcelona, Spain from the 23rd to the 27th of September 2007. The award recognises the outstanding contribution made by its recipient to the advancement of cancer nursing and is open to any cancer nurse including those engaged in clinical practice, research, education, management, political lobbying or other relevant activity which enhances the care of cancer patients or the status of cancer nursing within Europe. Completed nomina-

tions, including a signed nomination form, curriculum vitae and letters of support from three EONS members should be sent to the EONS Secretariat by January 31st 2007 and the recipient should be prepared to present the Distinguished Merit Award Lecture during the conference. Further information and nomination forms for the award can be found on the EONS website at [www.cancerworld.org/EONS](http://www.cancerworld.org/EONS)

### **References**

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- Delbecq, A.L., van de Ven, A.H., Gustafson, D.H., 1975. *Group Techniques for program Planning: A Guide to Nominal Group and Delphi Processes*. Scott Foresman, Glenview, IL.
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