World Cancer Day 2015: The developing role of cancer nurses

EONS President Erik van Muilekom and Past-President Birgitte Grube attended the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) conference in Australia at the end of 2014.

Birgitte Grube

At a session organised by EONS bringing together cancer nurses from the International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care hailing from Australia, the US, Canada and Asia, delegates discussed how cancer nursing is evolving throughout the world – from the emerging models of care to the most up-to-date developments in the workforce, such as registered nurse vs advanced practice nurse. The discussion also included changes in the scope of practice and how each society/country/area is coping with the implementation of interprofessional models of care, while maintaining the specialised oncology nurse role.

Each society discussed the challenges it faced and highlighted successful outcomes. EONS focused in particular on advanced cancer nursing in Europe and on the benefits of being part of a European organisation while developing a career and dealing with challenges.

During the UICC, cancer nurses from all over the world decided to mark World Cancer Day 2015 (4 February 2015), by developing a new position statement and asked the EONS Presidents to draft it, a task started on the flight back home and finalised after many consultations.

Nurses play an important role in addressing the health priorities of societies around the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that annual cancer cases will rise from 14 million in 2012 to 22 million in 2032. The growing demand for cancer care, from prevention to palliative care, along with rapidly changing healthcare systems, provides opportunities for cancer nurses to play a pivotal and increasingly important role in delivering high-quality, safe, effective and efficient healthcare to people affected by, or at risk from, cancer.

As the largest group of healthcare providers globally, in most countries around the world, nurses are the backbone of the healthcare delivery system.

High quality care across the cancer continuum requires nurses to be properly educated in order to gain knowledge, skills, and competencies unique to cancer care. Cancer content needs to be integral to the basic curriculum, along with opportunities for specialisation at various post-graduate levels. In a rapidly changing healthcare environment, opportunities for continuing education will ensure that nurses remain current in best evidence-based practices. It is pivotal to include education and research in cancer nursing as a political agenda priority.

The Asian Oncology Nursing Society (AONS), the Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (CANO/ACIO), the Cancer Nurses Society of Australia (CNSA), the European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS), the International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care (ISNCC), and the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), representing the oncology nurses across the globe, agree that:

Cancer care must be:
- person-centred,
- evidence-based, informed by research,
- delivered in a systematic manner,
- delivered in a quality practice environment, and
- meet society’s needs.

Cancer nursing education must be based on standardised, evidence-based curricula, adapted to meet each country’s needs, and based on lifelong learning. Policies must be in place to ensure that the nursing workforce is prepared to effectively provide care in a manner that promotes positive patient, system, and societal outcomes, be regulated, and sustainable.

Internationally, the contribution of cancer nurses must be valued at all levels of the healthcare and political system. Failure to do so will have a detrimental impact globally.

Position statement: ‘...Cancer nurses must be valued at all levels of the healthcare and political system.’