

EONS Advisory Council 2015

Young cancer nurses shape the future

The Advisory Council meeting took place in Athens, Greece, on 27 and 28 November, with 33 delegates from 19 countries participating. EONS President Daniel Kelly and Anna Papadouri from the Hellenic oncology Nurses Association welcomed the participants.

One important part of the meeting was a workshop for young cancer nurses (YCN), led by EONS Board Member Paul Trevatt. Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Iceland, and Portugal were represented. The following principles were agreed for the future of YCNs in EONS:

- A need for national cancer nursing societies to consider the role of younger cancer nurses
- A recognition of the role of social media in promoting networking and communication with younger cancer nurses (Snapchat, Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook)
- Reduced fees for younger cancer nurses to attend educational events
- A young cancer nurses workshop/meeting at each EONS event
- A page on the EONS website for young cancer nurses

Here, two YCNs that attended the EONS workshop tell us about their working lives, their hopes for the future and what they gained from the experience.

Sgourou Stavroula, Greece

Briefly tell us where you work and what your role involves

I work in a private General Hospital in the center of Athens, in the Oncology Department. Nurses are responsible for the patients' everyday hygiene, medication, symptom management, briefing doctors

and in general the right functioning of the department.

What are the challenges you feel you face as a young nurse?

There is a gap between expectations and reality. Young cancer nurses (YCN) have in their mind the ideal way of patient care and reality comes to overturn it because of the circumstances. This feeling of frustration covers the feelings of joy.

Have you met any obstacles to developing your skills/career?

To be honest, no. The Directors of Nursing and Human Resources are really receptive to educational programmes in the hospital and also help nurses to attend seminars and conferences.

Have you experienced any notable support or encouragement?

For our everyday problems, the support we have is each other. Nurses of the department usually talk about our problems having a coffee before our shift. This has proved very helpful and encouraging. This is because we face the same problems and challenges and we work under the same conditions.

What was it like to go to a workshop like the EONS one?

When I first heard about the EONS meeting I had no idea what it was about. I was afraid of the unknown. That first



Left to right: Kristina Karp (Estonia), Sara Pereira (Portugal), Sgourou Stavroula (Greece), Chara Kalogirou (Cyprus)

morning (only with three hours' sleep, because of a night shift) I walked into the meeting full of impatience. I took my seat in the central meeting room and tried to figure out who the other YCNs were. One of them was sitting right next to me (the Cyprus YCN) and we started chatting from the first moment.

What did you enjoy about it? What did you learn?

It was a unique experience. It was very interesting to communicate with nurses

across Europe and realise that they have the same problems as we do. Also, as this meeting was held in Athens, my hometown, it was very nice to explain to other colleagues about our history and monuments and feel their genuine interest.

What was it like to network with nurses from other countries and professional cultures? Did anything surprise you?

It was easy to communicate with nurses from other countries as we are all YCNs. It was really interesting to learn how they work and the differences between health systems. The truth is that they were shocked when they heard that we work almost every weekend. On the other hand, I was surprised when I heard details about their hospital organisation (e.g. different wards for different kinds of cancer) and how many nurses are on each shift.

Will you change anything about how you work now and how you seek opportunities to develop your career?

Developing my career was always one of my goals. Continuing education is the key to achieve this goal. As far as changing anything about the way I work, I would say many things which are not dependent on me or my colleagues.

How will you try to get more involved in EONS and the opportunities it offers for adding to your skills and developing your practice?

I have already accepted EONS' suggestion of being a YCN volunteer and to help with the online site creation. I have also applied for the 9th Oncology Nursing Masterclass: I firmly believe that it is one of the most educational programmes.

Would you recommend this experience to other young nurses?

Without a second thought. If someone has that chance, do not miss it!! I believe that every new group of YCNs will bring something different and new. That's why it is very important for all YCNs to support this EONS project.

Sara Torcato Parreira, Portugal

I have worked as a nurse since 2008, at a general hospital near Lisbon and as a nurse at the oncology day unit since 2011.

Recently, I became a member of the breast cancer group of the Portuguese Oncology Nursing Association. I consider myself to be a young cancer nurse (YCN), not only because of my age (29) but also because of the relatively short time I have been working in the oncology field.

Portugal has been facing an economic crisis for some years. I work for the public health care system and, therefore, I face some contingencies at my place of work as well as in my career. I feel that most of the nurses are tired of working so much with no benefits and that can be dangerous for the wellbeing of a team. It is hard to work in a place with a lack of human and material resources and still try to provide the best patient care. Due to this, some of the older nurses are suffering burn-out and some of the younger ones are unmotivated.

I still believe that most of us give our best, but adherence is weak when it comes to participating in extra professional activities related to nursing. For this to happen, motivation is the key and if you work in a place or country that provides you with none, this can be difficult. For me, as a young nurse in Portugal, it is really challenging when you have no career progression and you have to pay for most of the courses if you want to develop your knowledge and competencies – and, usually, you have to use your free time to do it. Luckily, I love my job and I still have hope that, one day, nurses' efforts will be rewarded and valued. I fear that, due to the lack of incentives, there might be a day when hope will fade, as I have seen happening to some nurses, but meanwhile, I have experienced encouragement from

my family, colleagues and mainly from my supervisor.

It was interesting to find that, when I talked with my colleagues at the EONS workshop for YCNs, most of us had similar opinions about the problems and concerns we face – especially when it came to motivation for nursing (extra professional) activities, opportunities for education and working relationships with colleagues and supervisors.

It was important for me to get in touch with different people from diverse countries. I became conscious that nursing practice can be really different across Europe, mainly when we talked about advanced practice. Being part of such an event was fantastic because I questioned myself about my country and others practices; and we discussed strategies in order to help find solutions for certain issues, some of them related to YCNs. I also became more aware of the philosophy and goals of EONS and how the members work to support cancer nurses. Reduced fees and the use of tools like the internet, for distance learning, or social networking, in order to share opportunities, are some examples that might help to get more young nurses involved.

Being at the EONS workshop made me recognise that Portugal needs to develop some of its nursing practices and that it is necessary to find strategies to motivate Portuguese cancer nurses. Since returning, I have already shared my experience with my colleagues and I wrote a testimony about my experience for the Portuguese Oncology Nursing Association magazine; stressing the importance of knowing and getting involved with what happens around us.

I truly recommend this experience to other young nurses because I think that such opportunities increase skills and competencies. I believe that change can start if the word is spread and if individual and team improvements are made. Development can start with each one of us and is very important not only for our patients but also for us nurses, and for nursing as a whole. I would like to thank EONS for the opportunity.

