The launch of EONS Breast Care Nursing Curriculum at this year’s ECCO–ESMO Congress in Berlin marks a milestone in the development of this specialty. For the first time, Europe has a single set of minimum training requirements that must be fulfilled in order to qualify as a breast care nurse. Though the requirements may be modest by the standards of some countries, they set a European benchmark that defines breast care nursing as a specialty that is patient-centred and carried out in partnership with the breast care team, the patient and their family.

The curriculum was drawn up by a panel of experienced breast care nurses from all over Europe. Some of them have contributed to this issue of the EONS Newsletter, which takes a broad look at the many aspects of this profession and the challenges and developments in the field.

Ilana Kadmon, who set up a breast care nursing service for the whole of Israel, discusses the need for agreed standards of education for the next generation. Yvonne Wengstrom, past president of EONS and Professor of Cancer Care and Eva Gustafsson from the Karolinska University Hospital in Sweden, shares thoughts on how to increase women's adherence to endocrine treatment. Saskia Claassen, an advanced nurse practitioner in breast cancer working in the Catharina hospital in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, takes part in assessing breast clinics throughout Europe and making sure that provision of breast care nursing is adequate. She gives us an insight into this work. Manuela Eicher, a research fellow at the University of Basel, Switzerland, describes how breast care nurses are well placed to respond to the changes in health care that are occurring throughout Europe.

Other contributions address the many varied aspects of the breast care nursing role. Mary Woods, consultant nurse in lymphoedema at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London and Surrey in the UK, gives us the latest on management of this condition. Kay Townsend, a lecturer at the University of Southampton, UK, gives an update on the complexities of breast cancer cell receptor sites and treatments. We have two contributions from the UK charity Breast Cancer Care. Emma Blows describes research about how to reach out to provide information and support to hard-to-reach groups in the UK, such as those from black and minority ethnic groups and older women with breast cancer. Liz Reed and Dora Wheeler have completed an important piece of work looking at the needs of women with secondary breast cancer.

This collection of articles show that the needs of breast cancer patients go well beyond diagnosis and treatment – their needs are broad ranging and long lasting.

My hope is that our nurse training takes us beyond the medical model of acute care and treatment and that we focus on the experience of breast cancer through its diagnosis, treatment and on to long-term living. Practising as breast care nurses, we focus on the needs of the patient, whatever their needs and agendas are, irrespective of where they are on the disease trajectory or what treatment they are having. By doing this, we enable women with breast cancer to achieve the goals that they set despite the constraints set upon them by their breast cancer experience.

Debbie Fenlon spent 12 years at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London as a nurse specialist working with women with breast cancer. She is currently a Senior Research Fellow based at the Macmillan Research Unit at the University of Southampton, where she specialises in cancer survivorship.