Scope of Practice

The radiation oncology nurse is a registered professional nurse who functions independently and interdependently with the radiation oncology team in providing quality patient care. The radiation oncology nurse provides clinical care, education, psychosocial support and consultation. The radiation oncology nurse may participate in the leadership roles of clinician, educator, administrative manager, consultant, and/or researcher. Using an evidence-based model of practice, the radiation oncology nurse provides nursing assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation, focusing on the continuum of care to support patients receiving radiation therapy, their families, and caregivers.

Radiation oncology nursing practice is based on the philosophic tenets identified in the Oncology Nursing Society’s (ONS’s) *Statement on the Scope and Standards of Oncology Nursing Practice* (Brant & Wickham, 2004). These standards and the ONS *Statement on the Scope and Standards of Advanced Practice Nursing in Oncology* (Jacobs, 2003) provide the framework that delineates these roles. Critical components of professional practice are driven by the following core values: integrity, innovation, stewardship, advocacy, excellence, and inclusiveness (ONS, 2002). ONS encourages radiation oncology nurses to assign personal meaning to each of these values.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is the hallmark of 21st century nursing. EBP “defines care that integrates best scientific evidence with clinical expertise, knowledge of pathophysiology, knowledge of psychosocial issues, and decision making preferences of patients” (Rutledge & Grant, 2002, p. 1). Evidence specific to radiation oncology also includes knowledge of the current and emerging technologies that are the foundation of radiation therapy, the symptoms associated with each therapy, and the growing number of biomarkers that help
predict outcomes. Evidence specific to radiation oncology also includes knowledge of the current and emerging technologies that are the foundation of radiation therapy. Oncology nurses recognize that there are levels of evidence ranging from the highest level of well-designed and conducted meta-analyses or randomized controlled clinical trials to lower, yet valuable, levels of evidence, including expert opinion. In practice, the radiation oncology nurse evaluates the evidence based upon a hierarchy of evidence including research. Radiation oncology nurses should incorporate and cite sources of current evidence in the topic area when developing policies, procedures, and guidelines for practice or publications.

It is recommended that minimal education for the radiation oncology nurse is a baccalaureate degree in nursing. Preferred nursing experience should include 2 years of oncology nursing; alternately, a 6–12 month didactic and clinically based preceptorship is highly recommended. Oncology nursing certification is also recommended.

The advanced practice nurse (APN) in radiation oncology through education and training has specialized knowledge and skills acquired through study and supervised practice. Educational preparation may include a master’s degree, post master’s certificate, doctorate degree, administrative degree or clinical research degree. The APN may function in the role of a clinical nurse specialist (CNS), nurse practitioner (NP), administrator or researcher. The CNS is an expert clinician whose role includes components of patient care, leadership, education, consultation and research. The NP is trained as a direct care provider and qualified to diagnose and manage acute and chronic illness, either independently or collaboratively with physicians. The administrator role may include budgetary, human resource, program development, and strategic planning. The clinical research role may incorporate participation in institutional review boards, cooperative group and investigator initiated studies and quality assurance roles.
related to research. The role of the APN in radiation oncology is still evolving and no practice standards are available (Shepard & Kelvin, 1999). Regardless of certification requirements, all oncology APNs must be licensed in their state as an RN and are subject to that state’s legal restraints, regulations, and privileges for recognition and licensure of advanced practice nursing (Jacobs, 2003).

Standards of Care

“Standards of Care” pertain to professional nursing activities demonstrated by the radiation oncology nurse through the nursing process. The nursing process is the foundation of clinical decision making and encompasses all significant action taken by nurses in providing oncology care to all patients and families (Brant & Wickham, 2004). The overall goal is to influence patients’ and families’/caregivers’ overall health, well-being, and quality of life across the care continuum.

Standard I. Assessment

The radiation oncology nurse assesses the needs of the patient and family throughout the continuum of care.

Standard II. Diagnosis

The radiation oncology nurse collaborates with other disciplines to analyze the assessment data and identify patient and family problems.

Standard III. Outcome identification

The radiation oncology nurse identifies evidence-based nursing interventions, which will guide expected patient and family outcomes.

Standard IV. Planning
The radiation oncology nurse develops and communicates an individualized, comprehensive, measurable plan for interventions to attain expected outcomes.

Standard V. Implementation

The radiation oncology nurse implements a plan of care that incorporates evidence-based resources to achieve expected outcomes.

Standard VI. Evaluation

The radiation oncology nurse systematically evaluates patient and family responses to interventions and the process of care.

Standards of Professional Performance

“Standards of Professional Performance” describe a competent level of behavior in the professional nursing role. The radiation oncology nurse should be self-directed and purposeful in seeking the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance professional development and clinical outcomes (Moore-Higgs et al., 2003).

Standard I. Quality of care

The radiation oncology nurse systematically evaluates and documents the effectiveness of clinical care.

Standard II. Accountability

The radiation oncology nurse evaluates his or her own nursing practice in relation to professional practice standards, relevant statutes, and regulations.

Standard III. Education
The radiation oncology nurse pursues ongoing professional development via educational activities that enhance critical thinking, knowledge, and skills related to the field of radiation oncology.

**Standard IV. Leadership**

The radiation oncology nurse serves as a leader, role model, and mentor for the professional development of peers and colleagues.

**Standard V. Ethics**

The radiation oncology nurse serves as a patient and family advocate, protecting personal health information and patient autonomy, dignity, and rights in a manner sensitive to spiritual, cultural, and ethnic practices based upon those put forth by the American Nurses Association (Fowler, 2008).

**Standard VI. Collaboration**

The radiation oncology nurse collaborates and consults with the patient and family, along with the multidisciplinary team, to enhance desired clinical outcomes.

**Standard VII. Research**

The radiation oncology nurse uses research as the scientific basis for nursing practice and participates in the conduct of research to improve patient outcomes.

**Standard VIII. Resource utilization**

The radiation oncology nurse works with the multi-disciplinary team to provide safe and effective care, securing appropriate services and financial resources as needed.
References


Radiation Oncology Scope and Standards Survey