

NURSING OF CANCER PATIENTS: ONCOLOGY NURSING

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Cancer care requires a multidisciplinary team effort approach and oncology nursing is a factor which is crucial and complementary to caretaking of cancer. Oncology nurses provide multi-faceted care in the stages of improving and sustaining good health, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. Besides clinical research, participation in clinical practices, training, consultations and management have expanded the field of oncology nursing. Oncology nurses work in many areas such as academic medical centres, oncology units, health care centres, doctors' surgeries, home care and hospices. There are also many specialist fields such as bone marrow transplantation, radiotherapy, surgical oncology, public awareness, genetic risk consultancy and prevention programs which are included in oncology nursing. In all of these areas, the general objective of oncology nurses is to ensure the functions of the patient and their families at the highest level during the course of the illness and to increase the quality of life.

It is expected that oncology nursing combines physical, psychological, social and spiritual health care in the services provided. With this in mind, the following aspects have been identified as important in the field of oncology nursing (Grundy, 2006):

- To assist the patient and family to adapt to living with cancer
- To provide supportive care during implementation of the cancer treatment and concentrated cancer treatment programs
- To prevent and manage problems occurring due to the cancer or treatment
 - Symptom management for individuals with relapsed or advanced stage cancers and providing physical, psychological and social support
 - To manage care taking to ensure that the most appropriate cancer care services are provided
 - To assess nursing practices in terms of cancer care and to conduct research
 - To provide recommendations, information and training to other health care professionals

- To provide leadership for the further development of oncology nursing practices

Cancer is a priority for community health. For this reason, the European Commission and the World Health Organisation (WHO) attempts to ensure or develop various forms of equality in the care of cancer by the following provisions:

- To ensure that complete health care services are provided in regards to primary, secondary and third level care

- To focus on primary care

- To develop the knowledge, practice and training of health professionals

- To coordinate international research

- To disseminate the research findings

In order to ensure equality in care, it is necessary for nurses' work towards developing a national level structure, together with their colleagues in other disciplines. This requires nurses to be at an equal status with other health professionals. However, nurses in European countries are not sufficiently valued and their work is not appreciated (Grundy, 2006).

In a study investigating the current status of oncology nursing in Europe (Glaus, 2003), the working conditions, training and developmental situation of nurses working in the field of oncology in European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS) member countries (20 of 22 member countries participated) were examined. The results of this study, which Turkey also participated, emphasises the following:

- There is a high demand for nurses in many European countries.

- Oncology nursing programs are found in 16 of the 20 participating countries with the duration of these programs ranging from 6 – 24 months (40 – 800 hours) and these oncology nursing training programs make use of the core programs of the EONS in various different ways.

- Oncology nursing is recognised as a specialised area in 11 countries and is duly remunerated.

- All countries except 3 (Turkey is one of the 3 countries) have specialised/expertise roles for nurses in palliative care.

- Specialised roles for cancer protection and prevention are gradually increasing.

- Senior positions for practicing nursing at the masters' degree level exist in 4 countries.

- Nursing practices development units/departments are common in only a few countries, including England and Sweden.

Quite often, treatment of cancer requires the combined use of various complex treatment modalities and it this is conducted over a long period of time. In order for the care taking to be of quality and safe, to reduce

the medical errors to a minimum, to ensure that the patient is strong enough to deal with the cancer, to prevent or reduce toxicity and side effects during the treatment, to provide palliative care requirements, to ensure that the patient continues to sufficiently eat and maintains a balanced diet, supporting the daily activities of the patient and to train patients and their families in these aspects requires the formal training of nurses (Foubert, 2006).

Oncology nurses are the individuals that transfer new information to patients, provide support during the care taking stage and assist the family of the patient in fulfilling the necessary requirements while explaining the reasons behind the required actions. The nurses must be trained in how they can provide support for the patient and how their family can support the patient if the care taking is to be conducted at home. The number of places which technology is not available or where diagnosis or treatment via the internet cannot be conducted or where care of cancer patients in the world cannot be accessed is very few. The advantages of web-based training or distance education can be utilised almost everywhere in the world (Ash, 2004).

Specialisation in oncology nursing is aimed at providing support for cancer patients and their families and to further develop care. It is for these reasons that there is increasing wide spread agreement that oncology nursing requires specialised knowledge and skills. However, specialisation in nursing is still not acknowledged especially in middle or eastern European countries.

It can be stated that oncology nursing started to be specialised in the 1950's. The first oncology nursing master degree in America was given in 1947 by the Nelson Teachers College of Columbia University and a Masters Program for Oncology Nursing began for the first time in 1968 at the University of Pittsburgh. The first national oncology nursing conference in America was in 1973 and the American Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) was established in 1975 (Hagopian, 2000).

The European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS) was established in 1984 with the following aims:

- To increase the quality of care provided to cancer patients by further developing the oncology nursing practices in European countries,
- To support and strengthen the development of oncology nursing as a special field.

Thirty two oncology nursing associations in 28 European countries continue their membership to the EONS.

DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT STATUS OF ONCOLOGY NURSING IN TURKEY

As with other countries, it can be stated that Turkey is on par with the professional developments for oncology nursing in the field of cancer and nursing. The first oncology training for nurses in Turkey was conducted in 1987. This meeting was attended by Marian Frederics of the Illinois University in America, who in turn invited Prof. Leman Birol to London to attend the “Primary Health Care Workshop and 5th International Conference for Oncology Nursing” in 1988. After attending this meeting, Ms. Birol shared the latest developments in oncology nursing and the documents she received with her colleagues. It was also decided that a meeting be organised to discuss the issues concerning the training programs of nursing students and graduates and academic teaching staff of 6 different Higher Education Institutes for Nursing should be invited to this meeting. After discussions held in this meeting, it was unanimously agreed upon the importance of early diagnosis of cancer. As a result of these meetings, the academic teaching staff held meetings with the nursing working in the oncology hospitals or internal-surgical clinics in their own regions (Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir and Sivas) to discuss and identify the problems and their training needs. As a result of these meetings, the training needs of nurses were identified as follows:

- Early diagnosis and risk factors
- Protection methods during chemotherapy
- Care of patients in the terminal stage
- Pain management
- Communication with patients oncological problems and their families
- Latest developments in oncology nursing

Due to the need to become organised to conduct such activities and to be able to reach graduate nurses working in this field, it was decided that an association for oncology nursing should be established (Birol, 2004). After much had work, the Association of Oncology Nursing was established on the 13th of October 1989 in Ankara with 12 founding members under the chairmanship of Ms. Leman Birol. The objective of this Association was “to develop understanding and knowledge of Oncology Nursing and to disseminate the understanding and knowledge developed”. The constitution of the Association contains these additional aims:

- a) Providing oncology related training for nurses and informing nurses about early diagnosis
- b) Raising public awareness of cancer
- c) Organising congress’, seminars and training courses
- d) Conducting research related to oncology nursing and supporting other existing research activities

- e) Cooperating with oncology related national and international institutions and organisations
- f) Sharing latest developments regarding oncology nursing with its members
- g) Representing the Association in national and international meetings
- h) Developing publications about oncology nursing

In the scope of these aims, activities which have been conducted are as follows:

I. Training Nurses on Oncology and Raising Awareness about Early Diagnosis. Since its establishment, the Association has conducted more than 20 training activities (such as protection, chemotherapy, quality of life, sexuality in cancer patients, breast cancer, stoma care, ethics, etc) and has participated in many other activities. In 1999, the XIIIth National Congress for Cancer allocated 2 days of the Congress to nursing. It was the first time that nursing was made a part of the congress and a national report was presented. The topic headings of this report were:

1. The lack of certification based standard and systematic training programs which would allow specialisation in oncology nursing
2. Insufficiencies in basic knowledge and practice and lack of motivation concerning the safe administration of antineoplastic medication for nurses working in the oncology units
3. Lack of monitoring required to identify health risks in health professionals working with these medications
4. Lack of a legally recognised job description for oncology nurses
5. Lack of occupational practice and working condition standards for oncology nurses
6. The desired level of understanding concerning team work is not present in the oncology units (Akyol 1999).

Between the years 1995 – 2003, the Association conducted a series of studies regarding the “precautions related to the preparation and administration of antineoplastic medication”. As a result of these studies, in 2004 the “Practical Guide to Antineoplastic Medication Safety” was developed in conjunction with the Ministry of Health. In the scope of a protocol signed with the Ministry of Health, the “Certificate Course Programme for Chemotherapy Nursing” began in 2005. The course duration was 37 hours (27 hours theory and 10 hours practical) and lasted for 5 working days. To date, 7 courses have been conducted and a total of 212 persons have participated and successfully completed this course.

EONS Education Project - TITAN (The Thrombocytopenia, Anaemia and Neutropenia Training Programme): The belief of the EONS that awareness raising of haematological toxicity is a priority, the TITAN training initiative was realised. Haematological toxicities such as

thrombocytopenia, anaemia and neutropenia have a significant effect on general health and may result in a reduction or postponement of such treatments as chemotherapy or radiotherapy. This postponement and reduction of dosage has a possibility of negatively affecting the quality of life and ultimately, the treatment received by the patient. Nurses who are informed about haematological toxicity will ensure that they understand how to be in control of any problems that may arise, how to identify patients that are at risk and will be able to inform patients of the related symptoms.

The program is implemented in 3 stages. In the first stage, participants are sent a 35 page booklet 2 weeks before the training starts so that they can prepare. The aim in doing so is to provide general information about haematological toxicities and to update the knowledge of the participants before the training starts.

The second stage involves providing a one-day training regarding management of haematological toxicities. In this stage, it is aimed for the nurses to learn in sessions of presentations, case studies and discussions concerning the main topics. One of the sessions includes discussing how informative/learning materials for patients and their families could be developed.

The third stage of the program includes the training. It is then expected that all the course participants are expected to implement a project in the 6 month period following the training. This is a very effective tool for not only the nurses but also the patients to be able to share their information about haematological toxicities. This project can be implemented individually or as a group. It can be conducted in the form of a conference or similar to a one-day training program or could be conducted to develop educational pamphlets for patients and their families. By doing so, they will not only be sharing the information they possess but it will also contribute to developing their communication/presentation skills.

The piloting study of the TITAN project was conducted in 2004 and implementation began in 2005. This project continues to be implemented in 13 languages in 23 countries (Germany, Austria, Australia, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, the Netherlands, the UK, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, Luxemburg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Turkey and Greece). The TITAN training materials were revised according to the new guidelines and it has been announced that approximately 1,600 nurses received training in 2006.

The project is implemented by the National Associations of Oncology Nursing of the countries which are members of EONS. The Association in Turkey had applied to conduct this training activity in 2005 and after the completion of the translation work and preparations, the first training was held on the 24th of December 2005 in Ankara. The second training was conducted in the scope of the 32nd National Congress for Haematology in Antalya on the 11th of November 2006

with the support of the Turkish Society of Haematology. The third was held in İzmir on the 6th of May 2007 and the fourth training was conducted in Istanbul on the 10th of June 2007. Close to 150 persons participated in this training. Four other training activities are planned to be conducted in the provinces of Istanbul, Ankara, Malatya and Adana in 2007.

II. Cooperating with national and international oncology institutions and organisations

Since its establishment, the Association continues to be a member of the European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS) and the International Society of Nursing in Cancer Care (ISNCC). In addition, international cooperation has also been conducted with other organisations such as the ESO, SIOP, UICC and MECC.

At the national level, training regarding protection from cancer and early diagnosis was provided in 1998 with the cooperation of the Department for Cancer Control of the Ministry of Health. Further cooperation was ensured in training regarding “Breast Self-Examination” and support was given with the provision of trainers. In addition to the joint meetings organised with such organisations as the Turkish Association for Paediatric Oncology, Medical Oncology Society and Turkish Society of Haematology, many training programmes on various topics were conducted in cooperation with regional hospitals, university hospitals and Higher Education Institutes for Nursing.

III. Conducting and Supporting Research regarding Oncology Nursing

Research on nursing provides a contribution to developments in cancer care and the most important areas have been supportive care and symptom control. Research concerning nursing is defined as the systematic investigation of patient responses to actual or potential health problems. This field of research is focused on specific questions directly related to the care provided by nurses and takes into consideration the patient and the biological, psychological and social aspects of the illness rather than the illness itself.

The EONS Research Commission has identified the priority areas of research for the next 5 years (2006-2011) (EONS News, 2007). The 3 priority areas of research that has been identified as a result of feedback from participants, including 20 members of the Association of Oncology Nursing of Turkey, are:

1. Development and assessment of clinical guides and care pathways
2. Symptom management
3. Psycho-oncology/psycho-social issues

Examples of research conducted by our Association are provided below:

- 1996- "Kemoterapi Hazırlayıp Uygulayan Hemşirelerin Durum Değerlendirmesi" [Baseline Study of Nurses Preparing and Administration of Chemotherapy] (Kubilay, 1997)
- 1999- "Onkoloji Hemşirelerinde Sitotoksik Antikanser İlaçlara Maruziyetin İncelenmesi ve DNA Hasarının Değerlendirilmesi" [Investigation of Oncology Nurses' Exposure to Cytotoxic Anti-Cancer Medication and Assessment of DNA Damage] (Burgaz, 1999)
- 2001- "Onkoloji Alanında Çalışan Hemşirelerin Bireysel Özellikleri, Çalışma Koşulları ve Rollerine Uygun İşlevleri" [Individual Characteristics, Working Conditions and Appropriate Functions in their Roles of Nurses Working in the Field of Oncology] (Gundogdu, 2002; Karadag, 2004)
- 2003- "Avrupa'da Kanser Hastalarının Kullandıkları Tamamlayıcı ve Alternatif (Geleneksel) Tedavilerin Kullanımı" [Use of Complementary and Alternative (Traditional) Treatments used by Cancer Patients in Europe], Joint study with EONS (Malasiotis, 2005; Algier, 2005).
- 2005- "Radyoterapi Hemşireliğinin Sorumlulukları ve Risk Faktörleri" [Responsibilities and Risk Factors in Radiotherapy Nursing]
- 2006- "Onkoloji hemşireliği Derneği Araştırma Teşvik Ödülü" [The Association of Oncology Nursing Research Encouragement Award] Presented to 3 research studies concerning oncology nursing sent to the National Congress of Nursing Students
- "Şimdilik Kadın Kadına" [Women to Women for now]: European Union project recommendation concerning the training of women in early diagnosis of breast cancer to be implemented in the province of Erzurum, 28 March 2005 and acceptance (8 March 2006) (Platin, 2007).

In addition to these, as a result of the work conducted for the development of the strategy plan in 2001, the vision of the strategy plan was identified to be "ensuring added value to society with the continuous development of oncology nursing". The strategy plan for 2007-2010 will attempt to reach the following objectives:

1. Enhancement of communication with members, national and international organisations and the community
2. Enhancement of the quality of care of oncology patients by developing practice-based post-graduate training programs for nurses
3. Protection and improvement of nurses' personal employment rights working in the field of oncology
4. Development of a practical guide for the field of oncology and to ensure its widespread use and conduct monitoring
5. Conducting research in the field of oncology nursing and providing support for these studies

The Association currently has 400 members. Latest developments in the field of oncology nursing are disseminated with the quarterly magazine of the Association. In addition, communication and interaction is sustained via the web site (www.onkohem.org.tr) established in 2005.

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