New survivorship resource for oncology nurses launched

By the time you read this editorial, a new self-learning resource on cancer survivorship for oncology nurses will have been launched. It is scheduled for release by the Canadian Oncology Nursing Association (CANO/ACIO) in time for Oncology Nursing Day this year.

I remember when cancer survivorship was a very new idea. My first real exposure to the emerging trend regarding cancer survivorship and the role oncology nurses might have occurred in 2005 when Esther Green (Past President of CANO/ACIO) and I (in my capacity as Past President of ISNCC) went to an invitational meeting in United States hosted by the American Journal of Nursing. The two-day meeting was held to review the state of the knowledge about cancer survivorship and explore the directions for oncology nursing. (The results of this meeting were published in the AJN the following March – Volume 106, Supplement 3).

The meeting opened my eyes to the unfolding reality regarding the escalating numbers of cancer survivors. There were more individuals living without clinical evidence of disease and more individuals living lengthy lives with controlled disease than ever before! And the numbers were expected to keep mounting. Never before had we been at this point in the history of cancer care.

But life was not entirely easy for these individuals. Many were living with late and long-term effects and compromised quality of life. Some experienced significant ongoing psychosocial distress. Clearly there was a role for oncology nursing to engage with this population.

Esther and I returned home with a commitment to share what we had learned and try to push the agenda regarding cancer survivorship and oncology nursing ahead in Canada. We eventually were able to present to the Board of CANO/ACIO and offer a presentation about survivorship at the Annual Conference. The Board was most responsive and decided to pursue the topic area.

After due consideration and effort, CANO/ACIO found the funding to develop a self-learning resource for oncology nurses about cancer survivorship. This was launched on the Association website in 2011. The resource clearly spelled out significant areas of concern for survivors and how oncology nurses could play a role in supporting them.

During the years since that time, the momentum surrounding cancer survivorship has continued and gained followers, both here in Canada as well as in many other parts of the world. We have seen a significant amount of research related to the care of survivors completed and roles for oncology nurses developed. Survivorship transition clinics and use of survivorship care plans have been implemented within a variety of settings.

But there is more to be done. Survivors are still reporting unmet needs after their cancer treatment has finished. The recent Canadian study of more than 13,000 cancer survivors tells a compelling story about unmet needs in physical, emotional and practical arenas [See Fitch et al., (2019) in Supportive Cancer Care]. Clearly survivors need oncology nurses who are informed about survivorship and have the current evidence about interventions to assist survivors at their fingertips!

This brings me back to the new resource. The 2011 version of the cancer survivorship resource was updated over the past year and a half. The CANO/ACIO Survivorship SIG provided oversight, and a range of expert nurses across Canada contributed their knowledge and writing time. Existing modules were updated with current information and evidence. New modules were added focused on adolescents and young adults and the care of older adults with cancer. Topics such as fear of recurrence, managing late and long-term effects, psychosocial distress, sexuality, and return to work are included. And the modules are available in French.

I encourage you to access the resource and take the time to learn about this expanding and very exciting development in cancer.

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