CANO conference reflections

by Holly Anderson

I have wanted to attend the annual CANO conference since I first heard about it early in my nursing education. Even before becoming a nurse, during my undergraduate degree in biology, I found the science behind oncology fascinating. Naturally, this interest is what motivated me to become an oncology nurse.

Once I began working as a nurse, while I was still interested in the cellular workings of cancer, I became pulled towards the patients’ needs; more specifically their psychosocial and survivorship care. Working in a small community oncology clinic, I strive to give my patients the best care possible, while working within the constraints of an overburdened system. I knew the CANO conference would provide me with the innovative ideas necessary to advance my nursing practice, but, most importantly, to try and provide the best care possible for the people I serve.

While I was quite confident beforehand that I was going to be thoroughly impressed at the conference, it far exceeded my expectations. I learned so much in so many different areas of practice, which is what I was expecting from the conference. What I did not anticipate, however, and the part that will likely truly change my practice, is the inspiration I received from all of the nurses presenting.

The presentations allowed me to see examples of nurses identifying gaps in the patient experience, carrying out research to understand how to best provide care and, finally, creating change in their clinics, hospitals, and health authorities. Being witness to this dedication and determination reinvigorated my passion, and instilled in me a renewed sense of tailoring care to what patients and families truly need. The conference also changed the lens from which I view certain approaches to care; it brought up issues, assumptions, and language that I needed to re-evaluate.

The ability to customize your learning made every workshop and session I attended align perfectly with my passion and interests, and kept me excited throughout the entire conference. As a nurse, it allowed me to be updated in all areas of practice: from the practical (updates on how to manage infusion reactions) to the psychosocial care of the patient (what to include in survivorship care plans), to the larger systems issues (how to integrate patient navigators in a health authority), to the soul-fulfilling conversations (which enabled us all to laugh, to cry and, ultimately, to remind us of the incredible work that we do).

Not only was I deeply inspired by the leaders in our profession, I also learned about the differences within the cancer care system across the country, and I was re-familiarized with the experimental designs and statistical analyses used to assimilate data. Perhaps most amazingly, I was able to share ideas and discuss patient care with the most incredible nurses across Canada, even while wearing a bright pink dress, a side pony, and fingerless gloves!

So, I guess that was my purpose—to take all that CANO had to offer and to try and implement what I can in a small clinic in B.C., and to enact the best care possible for my people. So far, I like to think I’m off to a good start.

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