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Guest Editorial

Recognising the impact and future potential of cancer nursing: The RECaN project and beyond



2017 is an important year in the history of the European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS). We are proud to be a founding member of the European CanCer Organisation (ECCO) where 24 oncology-specific professional societies share the common vision for promoting multidisciplinary cancer care of the highest quality in Europe. EONS itself comprises 32 member societies with members from all across Europe. We aim to benefit all our members through the CARE working groups which concentrate on Communication, Advocacy, Research and Education. These four groups provide for the core activities of EONS and through them we aim to extend the role and future potential of cancer nursing in Europe.

As a founding member of ECCO, EONS is also uniquely positioned to focus on consensus issues facing European nurses engaged in cancer care. This is a core goal of the Society and in 2017 we are undertaking our flagship RECaN project which, in its first two phases, will provide evidence of the range of nursing interventions that have employed trial methodologies, as well as providing insight into the role and scope of cancer nursing in four European countries. In the third phase we intend engaging with policy-makers at local, national and European level to understand the current situation in order to ensure that cancer nursing remains a top priority.

EONS also plays an important role in shaping and promoting oncopolicy through its participation in ECCO's Oncopolicy and Oncopolicy Executive Committees. The primary aim of these committees includes setting ECCO's policy priorities and ensuring that provision is made for all aspects of ECCO's Public Affairs activity. The current ECCO Policy pillars of activities include: (1) Quality Assurance & Organisation of Care, (2) Oncology Workforce and (3) General policy monitoring and shaping. As part of these pillars, ECCO drives both its own policy initiatives and also contributes to EU and other stakeholder initiatives. The latter initiatives include participation in: CANCON (Development of the European Guide on Quality Improvement in Comprehensive Cancer Control, <https://cancercontrol.eu/archived/>), the Joint Action on Rare Cancers (<http://jointactionrarecancers.eu/>), Contributions to the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), Euracan – ERN (European Reference Network) on rare cancers of adults (http://ec.europa.eu/health/ern/networks_en) to mention a few. ECCO's own driven initiatives include Translating Research into Care, Access to Innovation, Integrated Primary and Secondary Cancer Care, and developing the Essential Requirements in Quality Cancer Care (ERQCC – <http://www.ecco-org.eu/Global/News/Latest-News/2017/02/ECCO-Essential-Requirements-for-Quality-Cancer-Care>). ECCO also supports the RECaN – Recognising cancer nursing in Europe project

that is undertaken by EONS.

Our RECaN project is a good example of oncopolicy in action and as it consists of distinct but interrelated phases it addresses the pathway to impact on national cancer nursing working practices and cancer policy.

Phase I has involved a systematic review using 10 electronic databases (Medline, AMED, Epistemonikos, CINAHL, Embase, CENTRAL, CDSR, DARE, HTA, WHO ICTRP) on the impact of nursing on patient outcomes and experiences. The review has drawn on international evidence and aims to:

- Determine the effectiveness of interventions delivered by cancer nurses in improving the experience and outcomes of patients with cancer.
- Identify the roles and types of intervention activities that have been performed by cancer nurses.
- Investigate whether there is a relationship between cancer nurse education and training and patient experiences and outcomes.

Although preceding reviews have synthesised the evidence for specific nurse-led interventions (e.g. psychosocial and supportive care nursing interventions in breast cancer, nurse-led interventions involving telephone contact in women with gynaecological cancer, etc), none of these reviews has explored the impact of cancer nursing on patients' experiences and outcomes across the spectrum of cancer.

The evidence collected through Phase I will inform the Phase II of RECaN as outlined above. This will be achieved by identifying the potential barriers as well as facilitating factors to adopting nurse-led interventions in clinical practice and attaining overall recognition for cancer nursing. Four European countries have been chosen to act as case-studies; drawing on the scientific evidence from the systematic review and from in-depth data from key persons in the healthcare arena will allow evidence synthesis towards mapping the successful policy pathway(s) for achieving cancer nursing recognition. The identified countries include two where Cancer Nursing is already recognized and developed to advanced practice (Netherlands and UK) and two countries where Cancer Nursing is developing towards this status (Estonia and Germany).

The final Phase of the RECaN project will include the creation of a "white paper" on the need for Recognising Cancer Nursing across all European countries drawing on sources from across all three phases and on a range of other scientific evidence. The paper will be aimed at National and European policy makers (as well as

pressure groups such as patient advocacy groups) aiming to complement the current EU Directive 2013/55/EU. This directive provides the regulatory contextual framework on the recognition of professional qualifications based on an established system of automatic recognition across Europe for seven professions including doctors - generalists and specialists - and nurses in general practice. The findings from the RECaN are hoped to provide the contextual basis for extending the EU Directive 2013/55/EU to include specialized cancer nursing.

The RECaN projects build on previous initiatives demonstrating the added value of specialized and personalized cancer nursing interventions and can be considered in relation to increased professional mobility, the increasing need for comparable educational curricula, and career advancement for those wishing to specialise in cancer care within a multidisciplinary setting.

As we carry out the RECaN project we are aware of the rising global demand of cancer and the need for well-educated and motivated nurses to address the (often complex) needs of more and more patients. If we do not recognize the value of cancer nursing at the policy level (and also in terms of employment practices and education opportunities) then we risk simply not having the quality nurses needed to meet the cancer burden.

Cancer nurses are now a global commodity and more nurses are choosing to work in other countries where career opportunities may be better. This has implications for the host country, as well

the countries they are moving from. An example of this is contained in a recent report by NHS Employers who noted that in 2015 more than 60% of the UK's NHS Trusts had actively recruited nurses from outside the UK, and 55% were now considering doing so.

In this climate it is important to recognize the contribution that cancer nurses make and to ensure that their potential is maximized in whatever health economy they are employed in. In May 2017 EONS launched its first European Cancer Nursing Day (<https://www.europeancancernursingday.com/>) to establish a strong network of awareness about the value of nursing in this context. Its success was captured on social media and emphasized the sense of cohesion and pride that exists in nurses caring for people with a cancer diagnosis.

We look forward to building on this event with the empirical findings of the RECaN project and look forward to sharing these with colleagues around the world.

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