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# TRANSFORMATION OF THE AMERICAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM: IMPLICATIONS FOR CANCER CARE

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**OBJECTIVES:** *To explore the key drivers of the transformation of healthcare in the United States and the models and roles that oncology nurses will need to develop to further this transformation.*

**DATA SOURCES:** *Peer-reviewed journals, books, professional organization reports, government and national organization reports.*

**CONCLUSION:** *The American healthcare system is in the midst of a significant transformation that is driven by an evaluation of the quality and cost equations within the current economic models that support the delivery of healthcare. New models of care and new roles for healthcare providers are being developed. Some existing models are still evolving and could play a role in the transformation.*

**IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING PRACTICE:** *Nurses are in a pivotal role to lead many of the transformative approaches being considered. Through individual and organizational collaborations, partnerships and active engagement, nurses can and will shape the future.*

**KEY WORDS:** *healthcare reform, healthcare economics, cancer care delivery models, US cancer statistics, oncology nursing, palliative care.*

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Over the last 40 years, oncology nursing specialty organizations, and in particular, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) have made a significant impact on the care of oncology patients and their loved ones. Today, oncology nurses stand at another key milestone in history, with their profession

poised to significantly influence the delivery of healthcare to the citizens of this nation. The American healthcare system is in the midst of a revolutionary transformation. This transformation is driven by not one single variable, but by a collision of the social, cultural, technology, political and economic ecosystems that exist in the world today. This article will address the key drivers of the transformation of healthcare in the United States (US) and the considerations that oncology nurses will need to further explore and develop to transform the healthcare delivery system.

### PERSPECTIVE

To think about the future, it is often important to reflect upon the past and understand how far we have come, and yet, how far we have to go. For instance, in 1979, Jimmy Carter was President of the United States, Pink Floyd had just premiered “The Wall” in Los Angeles, Margaret Thatcher had just become the first woman to be elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and Iranian students had seized the US Embassy and taken 90 hostages for 444 days. It was in that same year that ONS published the first “Outcomes for Cancer Nursing Practice.” In 1979 there were no outpatient cancer treatment centers and almost all oncology treatments were delivered in the inpatient setting. There were limited pharmaceutical interventions for nausea and vomiting, oncology nurses mixed chemotherapy in medication rooms without laminar airflow hoods, and it was not a national standard to wear protective gear while mixing and/or administering chemotherapy.

This small segment of history provides some insight as to how much has already changed in the delivery of oncology care and practice of oncology nursing. There were individuals across this nation who thought moving cancer treatment to the outpatient setting would be detrimental to patients, but we now know that with thoughtful planning and support it has become a very effective model. It is important to apply this experience in a way that will allow us to think about all the possibilities for the future. This article will compare and contrast the current and historical trends in the key variables driving the transformation of healthcare and discuss elements to be considered for future state of care delivery models.

### CALL TO ACTION

The ONS is the world’s largest oncology nursing specialty organization and was started by a small group of oncology nurses who wanted to bring together other nurses delivering cancer care to learn from one another. These nurses sought to create a dialogue on how best to care for cancer patients and advance the practice of oncology nursing. If one talks with any of the original members, they will share that the journey over the last 40 years was not without obstacles, disagreements, and challenges. And yet, in the end the passion for “making the difference” transcended the differences. The time is now for oncology nurses in the US to collectively come together to transform and develop a roadmap for the way in which healthcare will be delivered in this country in the future. As healthcare continues to move from a historical fee-based service industry (where providers are paid every time a service is delivered to a patient) to models that pay for quality and episodes of care (value-based purchasing), oncology nurses must develop a deeper understanding of how best to further advance the agenda of quality and safety, while creating an exceptional patient experience at the lowest cost to advance the professional practice of oncology nursing.

This transformation will create an environment that will require: new models of care delivery that advance the implementation of evidence-based practice, establishment of expectations and standards for oncology nursing practice in population health models, collaboration of nursing researchers with providers to study the impact of the proposed changes in cancer care delivery models to further help inform the models and public policy, development of nurse-driven palliative care models to further support symptom management in cancer care, as well as, end-of-life care for cancer patients. To create this type of change, collaborative partnerships between professional organizations will be required to further advance the path of the future. In the midst of understanding the key drivers of change in healthcare, it is important to recognize that this is a time during which fragmentation within healthcare professions will not make the healthcare system stronger. More than ever before providers must come together and all stakeholders within the US healthcare system need to develop a collaborative roadmap describing what America’s healthcare system will look like. ONS and its members will need to specifically focus

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