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# THE ROLE OF ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSES IN CANCER SURVIVORSHIP CARE

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**OBJECTIVES:** *To review advanced practice nursing roles in planning, implementing, and evaluating survivorship care.*

**DATA SOURCES:** *Review of the literature, published articles, government and organizational reports.*

**CONCLUSION:** *The increased focus on improving post-treatment cancer care presents opportunities for advanced practice nurses to meet the physical and psychosocial needs of cancer survivors.*

**IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING PRACTICE:** *As experts in the comprehensive delivery of care, oncology advanced practice nurses are positioned to initiate, deliver, and evaluate survivorship care through innovative models.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Survivorship, advanced practice nurse, survivorship care model, survivorship care plan*

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**A**lthough overall cancer incidence has declined over the past decade, the number of cancer survivors continues to grow in the United States as a result of early detection and treatment advances.<sup>1</sup> The growing population of cancer survivors in the US exceeded 14.5 million in 2014, with approximately 65% of those diagnosed with cancer surviving for more than 5 years.<sup>2</sup> As a result, survivorship care is gaining prominence as a specialized field, with increased attention and recognition that care does not end with the completion of treatment but must be extended to include the survivors' long-term health needs. First to formally highlight these needs was the 2005 Institute of Medicine report *From Cancer Patient to Cancer Survivor: Lost in Transition*, which is the most comprehensive and influential proposal to date guiding survivorship care in the US.<sup>3</sup> In addition, advocacy groups, such as the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship ([www.canceradvocacy.org](http://www.canceradvocacy.org)) and the

LIVESTRONG Foundation ([www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)), are highly influential in raising awareness about cancer survivorship through national forums, public campaigns, and grass roots efforts. Other national organizations have joined the effort as well by developing important resources dedicated to improving survivorship care. The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) established a Survivorship Committee in 2012 with a comprehensive agenda that included the development of a simplified Treatment Summary and Care Plan (SCP) and the publication of survivorship guidelines that focus on long-term and late effects. To date, ASCO has released three evidence-based clinical practice guidelines focused on the prevention and management of symptoms that affect many cancer survivors; neuropathy, fatigue, and depression and anxiety. These recommendations reinforce the need to care for both the physical and psychological needs of cancer survivors.<sup>4</sup>

The American Cancer Society (ACS) established a National Cancer Survivorship Resource Center funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop survivorship guidelines for survivors of various cancers, including melanoma, breast, prostate, head and neck, lung, colorectal, and gynecologic cancers.<sup>5</sup> In 2014, the ACS published the first set of comprehensive guidelines for the care of prostate cancer survivors. These recommendations were established through expert consensus and available evidence to address surveillance for recurrence, screening for second malignancies, assessment and management of long-term and late effects, health promotion, and care coordination among providers.<sup>6</sup> In 2013, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network issued its first ever *Clinical Practice Survivorship Guidelines* with an updated version in 2015.<sup>7</sup> These guidelines address long-term and late effects, including altered cognitive function, sleep disturbance, pain, fatigue, sexual dysfunction, cardiac toxicity, and anxiety and depression.<sup>7</sup> They also address preventive health and healthy lifestyles choices, including physical activity, dietary supplement use, and weight management. The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) has an active Survivorship, Quality of Life and Rehabilitation Special Interest Group focused on assuring that survivorship issues are addressed at their annual congress. ONS has also developed a suite of evidence-based resources, *Putting Evidence into Practice*, designed to guide teaching and patient care interventions. Eight of the 22

topics are relevant to survivorship, including cognitive impairment, fatigue, and pain.<sup>8</sup>

As the field of cancer survivorship grows, the need for specialized expertise and new care delivery models presents an opportunity for advanced practice nurses (APNs) in oncology care. This article will discuss the essential elements of survivorship care, the evolving models of care delivery, and the increasingly important role of APNs in developing, implementing, and evaluating survivorship care in the US.

### ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF SURVIVORSHIP CARE

The 2005 Institute of Medicine report identified standard components of survivorship care essential to the quality of life for cancer survivors. These standards include: recommendations for screening of new cancers; surveillance for cancer recurrence; assessment and intervention of medical and psychosocial late and long-term effects due to cancer treatment; coordination between the specialist and the primary care provider (PCP); and access to resources to meet survivors' needs (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup> Expanding upon these elements, ASCO recommendations also include familial or genetic risk assessment, counseling on health promotion activities (such as diet and exercise), and empowering survivors to advocate for themselves.<sup>9</sup>

**TABLE 1.**  
**Essential Components of Survivorship Care**

1. **Prevention** of recurrent and new cancers, and of other late effects;
2. **Surveillance** for cancer spread, recurrence or second cancers; assessment of medical and psychosocial late effects;
3. **Intervention** for consequences of cancer and its treatment, for example, medical problems such as lymphedema and sexual dysfunction; symptoms, including pain and fatigue; psychological distress experienced by cancer survivors and their caregivers; and concerns related to employment, insurance, and disability, and
4. **Coordination** between specialists and PCPs to ensure that all of the survivor's health needs are met.

Reused with permission. Hewitt M, Greenfield S, Stovall E. *From cancer patient to cancer survivor; lost in transition*. 2006. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.<sup>3</sup>

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