

Equity in Cancer Care Strategies for Oncology Nurses



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KEYWORDS

• Oncology • Cancer • Nursing • Inequities • Advocacy • Leadership

KEY POINTS

- Despite improvements in cancer treatment and outcomes, inequities have been increasingly documented in the cancer population, particularly among those experiencing marginalizing conditions within society.
- Oncology nurses have a social justice imperative to address inequities in cancer care, although this aspect of their role is underdeveloped.
- Equity-oriented strategies that draw on a social justice imperative consider the social determinants of health, as well as those factors, contexts, and structures that influence individuals' ability to optimize their health.
- To effectively address inequities, oncology nurses may take a two-pronged approach, including equity-oriented strategies focusing on the direct care of individuals and communities, as well as addressing the root causes of inequity through leadership, policy influence, advocacy, education, and research.

INTRODUCTION

A central tenet of high quality cancer care includes equitable care for all.¹⁻⁴ However, even within high-resource countries, such as Canada and the United States, achieving equitable and quality cancer care largely remains unrealized. Increasingly, health inequities (sometimes called health disparities) are documented among people living with cancer, particularly individuals living in rural and remote settings, of lower socioeconomic status, who are older with advanced disease at diagnosis, indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, and immigrants.^{1,5-9} Most efforts to address cancer care inequities are aimed at improving access to care (eg, through the introduction of nurse navigator roles), or by attempting to change behaviors (eg, smoking cessation, healthy eating, exercise programs). Despite these efforts, cancer care inequities persist and are increasing in many areas.⁵ These narrowly focused efforts may never fully address inequities and may unintentionally marginalize vulnerable people. A broader view is needed that incorporates the social determinants of health (SDH), including factors

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