

# Reaching Out to Nursing Students

## A community cancer center devises an oncology rotation for nursing students

by Mary Ann Mugal, RN, MS, AOCN, and Tamela Williamson, RN, MS, AOCN



In recent years, nursing leadership at Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital in Richmond, Va., has worked to build partnerships with baccalaureate programs within our state. We are fortunate to have a BSN program and three associate degree nursing programs in our immediate area. However, as today's nursing shortage is at least partly related to the lack of nursing faculty in our schools, we believed we had a professional responsibility to reach out to nursing schools in our state that have less access to clinical sites. Our Master's prepared nurses and APNs (advanced practice nurses) were willing to act as preceptors, and so we made the decision to move forward with our plan.

### How Our Program Works

We approached two large universities, Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., and James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. The deans of these schools of nursing were very excited about our offer to serve as a clinical site for nursing students. James Madison University is located approximately two hours east of our facility. Their nursing students are offered a "Capstone" experience in their senior year. They choose a clinical area of interest and follow a RN preceptor for a six-week period. Most of the students who have chosen this experience with us are Richmond natives and live with friends or family during their preceptorship. Liberty University, located approximately two hours southeast of us, actually brings clinical groups with their instructors to our hospital. The university secures housing for the students in the Richmond area while they are in their clinical rotation. In addition, we have students from two other large universities within the state, the University of Virginia and Virginia Common-

(Above left) Tami Williamson, RN, MS, AOCN, oncology clinical nurse specialist at Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital (left), discusses radiation oncology services with Amy Kegly, a senior nursing student at University of Virginia, while oncology nurse navigator Donna Moore-Wilson (center) demonstrates a patient's position on the program's Trilogy linear accelerator.

(Above) In the cancer center's resource library, senior nursing student Amy Kegly (left) reviews informational materials with Tami Williamson, RN, MS, AOCN, oncology clinical nurse specialist.

wealth University, who are sent to us for precepted "management" experiences.

The experience has been a win-win experience for Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, as our facility has been able to hire several high quality graduates from each of these programs.

As leaders of the oncology program, we decided that we needed to offer students a more focused experience regarding the care of the patient diagnosed with cancer. The role of the oncology nurse has expanded over the years, and we know that it is difficult to see the continuum of care from the medical oncology unit bedside only. Our Clinical Nurse Specialist worked with members of our oncology nursing team to develop a unique experience for our nursing students. We expect that the experience will assist the student in seeing the rewards of choosing a career in oncology nursing.

## Nursing Student Learning Objectives

**Outpatient infusion center**—The student will develop an understanding of the role of the oncology nurse in the infusion center and describe the patient's experience.

**Women's imaging center**—The student will describe the role of the oncology nurse in the women's imaging center and identify the steps for screening, consenting, and preparing the patient for biopsy.

**3 North Women's Specialty Unit**—The student will describe the patient's experience with the surgical treatment modality.

**Hospice**—The student will describe the role of the hospice nurse and develop an understanding of hospice care.

**Oncology nurse navigator**—The student will describe the role of the oncology nurse navigator.

**Oncology nursing research**—The student will describe the role of the research nurse and describe a nursing research project in oncology.

**Cancer support groups**—The student will attend a cancer support group and describe the importance of providing support to

patients and patients providing support for each other through their cancer experience.

**Cullather Brain Tumor Quality of Life Center**—The student will discuss the unique physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs of patients with brain tumors across the illness trajectory.

**Patient advocate**—The student will describe the role of the patient advocate in the care of patients at St. Mary's Hospital in the Cancer Resource Center and Cullather Center.

**Cancer conference**—The student will attend a cancer conference and understand the importance of the multidisciplinary discussion.

**Radiation oncology**—The student will describe the role of the oncology nurse in radiation oncology and develop an understanding of the different radiation treatment options.

**Oncology clinical nurse specialist**—The student will describe the role of the CNS in the care and education of cancer patients and their families and also in providing education and mentoring to oncology nurses.

### Our Oncology Rotation

We developed a program in which nursing students have several days to rotate through the different components of our oncology program. The goal of the rotation is to recruit nurses to oncology by exposing students to the many different facets of oncology nursing.

The comprehensive cancer program at Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital has been approved by the American College of Surgeons since 1975, and sees approximately 1,800 new cancer patients annually. Among the components of our oncology program are:

- An outpatient infusion center
- Hospice
- A women's imaging center
- Oncology nurse navigator services
- A research program
- Cancer support groups
- The Cullather Brain Tumor Quality of Life Center
- Multidisciplinary cancer conference
- Radiation oncology services
- An oncology clinical nurse specialist.

Nursing students have the opportunity to rotate through each area and meet with oncology nurses who perform different roles within our cancer program. In this way, students learn about the varied nature of oncology nursing practice and explore different career opportunities. During the rotation, students are also learning about the different cancer treatment modalities. Students gain an appreciation for oncology nursing and insight into the patient and family cancer experience. The rotation takes approximately two days with the student spending one to two hours in each area (see learning objectives above).

### Measures of Success

For nurses that are newly hired to our institution, we provide a full week of classroom nursing orientation. New graduates are given an additional two weeks of clinical orientation with a "super-preceptor." During this two-week period, newly graduated RNs are paired with experienced nurses to perform basic skills common to all areas. Our hospital also offers an RN Residency Program to all new graduate hires. This year-long program focuses on assimilation into our facility.

The new oncology RN will attend these programs but also receives additional support from our Clinical Nurse Specialist. We believe that the support offered to these new nurses is invaluable. As a result, our RN first-year turnover rate has decreased from 30 percent to 6.7 percent over a three-year period.

All of the nursing schools have been interested in sending their students through our oncology rotation. Students participate when they are in their "precepted management rotation." We have received excellent feedback from the students to date, and look forward to having more students participate in the oncology rotation experience. We initiated the oncology rotation in 2009, and the nursing students who have rotated through have not yet graduated, so we do not know yet whether any of the students will choose to enter the field of oncology nursing or decide on employment with us, but that is our hope. ☐

---

*Mary Ann Mugal, RN, MS, AOCN, is administrative director, Oncology, and Tamela Williamson, RN, MS, AOCN, is oncology clinical nurse specialist, at Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital in Richmond, Va.*