

Cancer Council Queensland/Queensland Nurses Union Oncology Nursing
Scholarship for Metropolitan Nurses

I wish to thank Cancer Council Queensland for giving me this wonderful opportunity to attend the Oncology Nursing Society, 36th Annual Congress in Boston USA from April 28th – May 1st 2011. The study and travel grant awarded to me gave me the opportunity to present my paper at this conference, ‘Bridging the Gap – Improved patient outcomes and increased staff safety directly attributed to the delivery of the “safe handling of oral chemotherapy” education program at Mater Health Services’. There were 3,000 oncology nurses who attended this conference from USA, Australia, Europe and Asia. I was able to network, share knowledge and experience, and develop professional relations with oncology nurses from many countries. My passion for educating the nurses at the bedside will be enhanced by the knowledge, innovative care initiatives and up to date information that I have gained from attending the conference. I will therefore ensure that individuals living with cancer will continue to receive the best possible care with evidence based nursing practice.

The opening ceremony keynote speaker/ performer, Charlie Lustman is a composer and cancer survivor who lost his upper jaw to an extremely rare osteosarcoma. Charlie is a writer, producer and performer of his original songs about his cancer experience. *Make*

Me Nuclear, the title track of his CD and one-man operetta, has inspired thousands of people at hospital, cancer centres, schools, churches, theatres and other locations where he has shared his inspirational message of hope. Through song and humour, Charlie took us on his journey from diagnosis, surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy to survivorship. Charlie glows with effusive energy, radiating a passion for life and he showed the audience of oncology nurses how to look at suffering as an opportunity to appreciate that we have some say in the way we change when faced with adversity. This whole session was very uplifting and Charlie was extremely inspiring. He is currently planning a world tour and said that he would love to come to Australia to share his message.

Another very inspiring speaker was Betty Ferrell a Registered Nurse and research scientist at the City of Hope Medical Centre in Duarte, CA. Betty presented a lecture on the vital role nurses play in providing psychosocial support for patients with advanced cancer and those facing the end of life. Betty told the stories of palliative care nurses around the world, focusing on pain management, quality of life and palliative care practices. Betty suggested that the end of life is an opportunity for meaning, comfort and growth. People around the world are dying well, due to oncology nurses. As oncology nurses

we provide a voice for patients and our focus must be on relieving suffering.

The Repatriation hospitals in the USA, have adopted the concept of 'The final journey', where it is announced over the loud speaker at the hospital when a veteran has died so staff and families can come and pay their respects before the person is taken from the room. The veteran is transported through the hospital with dignity to the mortuary with the American flag over the casket, rather than being taken out the back door and down in the service lifts so that no one can see them.

Betty Ferrell states that as oncology and palliative care nurses, we must rethink the way people die. Around the world, oncology nurses are questioning what is happening, why it is happening and challenging the paradigm of care to rethink the kind of care our patient's really need. Restoring the patient's dignity, giving respectful care and being fully present to each patient. Oncology and palliative care nurses must be visionary and think about 'what good care can look like'.

There were sessions that focused on compassion fatigue and ways nurses can overcome some of the issues. An oncology ward in the USA places a picture of a white dove on the door frame of the

room when a patient is at the end of life, to remind staff to speak softly and enter the room quietly as a mark of respect for the patient and their family. They also have a remembrance tree so when the patient dies the staff can remember the person by placing a message on the tree and say goodbye.

There was a poster session on fungating wounds, where a USA hospital was using active leptospermum honey (ALH) dressings with fungating tumour wounds. Their research suggested that it decreases oxidative stress by clearing free radicals, therefore reducing inflammatory cells and pain. The honey effectively reduces and eradicates odour. The honey's glucose produces lactic acid instead of amino acid, produces malodorous ammonia, amines and sulphur compounds. The high sugar content facilitates the movement of fluid from high concentration to lower concentration, therefore the lymph fluid is drawn to the surface which helps lift necrotic tissue, cleanse the wound and decrease exudates. The result is to promote debridement, increase comfort and improve the quality of life for the patient. Staff must follow up to date policy and procedures.

There were sessions on safe handling and chemotherapy competency and the main theme from these sessions is that clinical practice and training for the nurses needs to be consistent throughout the clinical areas. Discussions around the importance of

interaction and communication between the oncology wards and the medical wards is extremely important so that outlying patients and their families get the best possible care. Annual chemotherapy competency is essential to keep up to date with changes in practice and remain current. It is an expectation for every institution that all nurses who administer chemotherapy remain up to date and have a current competency. It seems that these issues are similar in all hospitals world wide.

When I delivered my presentation on oral chemotherapy administration and safe handling education for non oncology clinicians who work on medical wards caring for oncology and Haematology patients, there was a great deal of discussion on who delivers the education for not only the RNs but also patient care assistants. Concerns were raised about educating and protecting all staff who may come in contact with cytotoxic patient waste.

Thankyou again to Cancer Council Queensland for my attendance at this Congress in Boston. The conference sessions and the international oncology colleagues I met, gave me the opportunity to rejuvenate my spirit and learn innovative ways to improve care for patients. I had time to reflect on how important oncology nurses are

in the lives of their patients and their families, from diagnosis to being there when they take their last breath. As oncology nurses we provide such an incredible service but rarely stop to acknowledge this. My mission as an oncology nurse educator is to advocate for our patients, support oncology nurses and strive to be a competent nursing leader.