

Oncology nurses - unsung heroes

With cancer survivors and their families celebrating hope and life on International Cancer Survivors Day, 3 June, Be Cancer Aware (BCA) decided to take the opportunity to focus on the support cancer patients receive during and after their treatment. One of the biggest support systems comes from oncology nurses.



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"Their caring attitude made me feel special," Ann Steyn tells BCA. "What could have been an awful experience became bearable and by the end of the treatment we knew a lot about each other. I would pop to see them when I came for my check ups." This shows just how important nurses are to patient care and morale.

This is why BCA is taking the opportunity to the contribution oncology nurses have made to cancer care, at the medical world. Their continued encouragement and nurturing improves the lives of many cancer patients and survivors.

Role of nursing

Oncology nurses work with people who have been newly diagnosed with cancer, receiving on-going treatment or are in remission; helping patients through a trying period that can span months, and even years.

Nurses are usually the closest to the patients; the role of a modern oncology nurse includes being a caregiver, educator, administrator and, almost always, a counsellor. This type of care takes special dedication.

Changing medical landscape

Practicing as an oncology nurse requires additional training, which allows them to work within different areas of oncology treatment and care such as: chemotherapy, radiation, bone marrow transplant, prevention and early detection, and palliative care.

Prior to 1950, cancer was mainly treated with surgery. However, as treatment methods evolved, so did the role of nursing.

The 1971 National Cancer Act in the United States revolutionised cancer programmes. They began focusing on improving quality of life and reducing the incidence of cancer. This allowed for the role of nursing in oncology to expand, and since then, it has continued to develop.

Encouragement and appreciation

"Oncology nurses are often faced with looking after terminally ill patients and this must be incredibly hard and depressing," says Anne Duggan whose sister lost a four-year battle with cancer.

"As a family member, you feel so utterly helpless and desperate but I was always so touched and encouraged at how the nurses came to her ward and greeted her with such loving enthusiasm each morning. It was during this time that I realised their jobs are not just jobs... it's a calling."

With this in mind, Roche and BCA take this opportunity to honour the committed and passionate work of all oncology nurses in South Africa. Their loyalty and delivery of quality patient care has changed the lives of many cancer sufferers and survivors.

Cancer patients and survivors can share the positive experiences they have had with their oncology nurses on the BCA Facebook page: Be Cancer Aware. Further information on cancer can be found at www.becanceraware.co.za.

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