

## EDITORIAL

## Building a sustainable future in cancer nursing

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An estimated 28.4 million new patients are predicted to have cancer globally in 2040, compared to 19.3 million in 2020 (Sung et al., 2021). With over 20 million nurses and midwives globally, nurses represent the largest group of healthcare professionals and have an important role in reducing the burden of cancer (Yates et al., 2021). As in other continents, Europe is facing a significant challenge related to cancer (Dyba et al., 2021). The burden of cancer will increase even more in an aging Europe (The European Cancer Inequalities Registry, 2023). Cancer nurses across Europe are tasked with delivering an increasing number of complex treatments and supportive care interventions due to advances in cancer research and a rise in cancer incidence due to demographic changes (Kelly et al., 2020).

The cancer care continuum encompasses all stages from prevention to survivorship and rehabilitation, or to palliative care (Young et al., 2020). Nurses are vital in alleviating the burden of cancer by administering complex treatments, managing complications promptly and safely, offering comprehensive care to people with cancer and their families in various healthcare settings, and empowering them to take an active role in managing the disease (Challinor et al., 2016; Charalambous et al., 2018). Health care is rapidly evolving towards a digital future, integrating technological solutions into the care of people with cancer across all stages and settings (Charalambous, 2020).

With the increasing demands posed by cancer, cancer nurses are also challenged by the sustainability of future cancer care. The global cancer nursing workforce is essential to achieving sustainable development in the cancer care setting (Young et al., 2020). As cancer nurses, we are at the forefront of patient care, providing essential support and treatment to those battling cancer. In their daily practice, cancer nurses have a unique opportunity to contribute to a more sustainable healthcare system. Sustainability in cancer care is not just about

the financial and economic aspects of care services and the environment. It also encompasses social dimensions, ensuring that nursing practices are efficient, cost-effective, and equitable. Additionally, this means that issues concerning the nursing workforce and the well-being of healthcare professionals need to be addressed, and the expertise of cancer nurses better utilized.

Sustainability can be seen as a key element of cancer care. We know that past and current approaches to cancer care may not be sufficient for tomorrow. Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (O'Reilly et al., 2024). Resources are and will be limited, but at the same time, we face the demands of improving the efficiency of cancer care. Furthermore, the effects of climate change on human health and people at risk of or with cancer are considerable and wide-ranging and need to be addressed in cancer nursing practice.

To improve sustainability and efficiency in the cancer care setting and supportive care, we need to begin with a better understanding of what outcomes we are trying to achieve for people with cancer. This means both eliminating what brings little or no benefit to people with cancer and prioritizing interventions that offer the greatest benefit to them and the greatest value to the system overall. Reducing inefficiency is key to ensuring the sustainability of cancer care and improving the experience of people with cancer (Hodge & Wait, 2022). Thus, healthcare professionals need guidance on how to sustain the costs of cancer care and address the environmental impact of cancer care services while offering the most appropriate supportive care to people with and affected by cancer.

There is a growing body of evidence that care delivered by cancer nurses has a positive impact on the quality of care and patient outcomes (Campbell et al., 2017; Charalambous et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2022; Tuominen et al., 2019). However, a lack of access to continuing education, a lack

of recognition, and workforce issues regarding retention and well-being at work have been raised (Challinor et al., 2020; Drury et al., 2023; Sulosaari et al., 2023). Solutions must be found (Truant & Chan, 2017; World Health Organization, 2022). Furthermore, economic and linguistic disparities in the European region create obstacles to accessing specialist training, thereby hindering mobility. (Drury & Diez de Los Rios, 2021).

Strategic planning for a transformed workforce must focus on leveraging nursing expertise and fostering positive work environments (Weston et al., 2022). Expert nursing skills and supportive work environments can foster a positive professional practice setting, supporting the transformation of cancer nursing, enhancing the resilience of healthcare systems, and developing effective retention strategies (Bahlman-van Ooijen et al., 2023). Communication, advocacy, research, and education in cancer nursing are intertwined. Cancer nurses can lead, develop, and evaluate policy options within organizations and foster political dialogue at national and global levels to improve cancer care (European Oncology Nursing Society [EONS], 2024) and the sustainability of future cancer care services. To initiate and sustain progress, political leadership is essential, while intellectual leadership is crucial for fostering local engagement in implementing national policies and driving change. A unified vision from leaders at various levels of the system, along with clinical leadership to translate policy into action, is necessary (Morris et al., 2022).

Professional oncology nursing organizations such as EONS are pivotal in uniting academics, researchers, clinicians, educators, and patient representatives. By fostering closer collaboration, these organizations can advance evidence-based cancer nursing practices, expand opportunities for continuing education and networking, and enable cancer nurses to fully utilize their skills. In addition, they can develop sustainable cancer care systems that align with the needs of people affected by cancer and ensure the long-term viability of care services for future generations.

EONS, as a professional organization and community of cancer nurses, is committed to education and advocacy. EONS offers accessible education, promotes the importance of quality and sustainability in cancer care, and advocates for the needs of people affected by cancer. EONS actively engages in activities aimed at raising awareness around various health issues, communicating and disseminating information, providing training,

and fostering expert collaboration and networking (cancernurse.eu). Enhanced collaboration between patient and cancer nursing organizations is essential if they are to influence policymakers at community, government, and global levels, with the aim of achieving value-based healthcare (Challinor et al., 2020).

The sustainability of cancer care is a challenge to our profession, but together with other organizations and policymakers, we can find ways to improve healthcare systems, tackle the challenges of the environmental impact of our services, develop future cancer services, and improve the working environments of healthcare professionals. Let us work together for a better and sustainable future.

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