

## ISNCC POSITION STATEMENT

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**Document Title:** ISNCC Radiation Therapy Nursing Practice Position Statement

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### **Purpose**

To advocate for the role of the nurses in the provision of radiation therapy to patients worldwide, including:

- Responsibilities of the nurse working in radiation oncology settings.
- Regulatory requirements and standards for ensuring safe and quality nursing care for patient receiving radiation therapy.

### **Background**

Current evidence indicates that nearly 60% of people with cancer could benefit from radiation therapy (1). For some, radiation is the only treatment needed. For others, radiation therapy is part of a multimodality approach, which might also include adjuvant treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy, or bone marrow transplant. When cure is not possible, radiation offers effective palliation for complex symptoms such as pain or breathlessness and, can be used to manage oncological emergencies such as superior-vena cava obstruction or spinal cord compression. (1, 2) Unfortunately, access to radiation facilities in many low and middle-income countries is limited. (3)

The goal of radiation therapy is to destroy or slow the growth of cancer cells through damage to cellular DNA. Treatments are spread over a number of days or weeks allowing safe delivery of the total radiation dose required to treat the cancer via smaller fractions. Damage to cellular DNA occurs immediately, and cancer cells die over a period of days, weeks or maybe even months. Once destroyed cells are eliminated by the body. Usually, healthy cells, unlike cancer cells, in the radiation treatment field are able to recover.

Nurses play a central role as part of a multidisciplinary team providing preparatory information, skilled assessment, surveillance and early management of side effects- to people receiving radiotherapy. (2,4,5) Nurses provide direct care and support to patients receiving radiotherapy and their families/caregivers. Patients receiving radiation therapy require care for early, chronic and late physical and psychosocial effects, to prevent and minimize these complications. Nurses in radiation oncology settings assess and educate patients about radiotherapy by addressing patient concerns and providing information about potential adverse effects (6-8). In many low and middle-income countries nurses are working in radiation oncology settings with minimal educational training and standards for environmental workplace safety, which increases risk of occupational exposure to radiation. (9)

## **Position**

The International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care (ISNCC) is committed to promoting a comprehensive approach to providing care to patients receiving radiation therapy.

ISNCC is committed to advocating to ensure the role of the nurse in radiation oncology settings is optimized for the benefit of patients receiving this treatment and their caregivers, because nurses working in radiation oncology settings:

- are in a key position to ensure comprehensive care for patients who receive radiation therapy and their caregivers.
- provide evidence-based care, which includes nursing assessment, diagnosis, outcome identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation, along the continuum of care, to support patients, their families, and caregivers (9, 10, and 11).
- can facilitate transitions and coordination of care for patients receiving multimodal treatments.

## **ISNCC recommends that organizations providing radiation oncology settings:**

1. Establish radiation treatment modality policies regarding, staff and patient safety and occupational monitoring for health care workers.
2. Establish positions for nurses working in radiation oncology that ensure the nurse's role in identifying and minimizing complications and preventing treatment delays is optimized.
3. Ensure the multidisciplinary team includes nurses who are educated in radiation oncology and who can promote continuity of care and coordinated care.
4. Provide access to education programs for radiation oncology nurses, which enable evidence-based practice, and ensures optimal outcomes for patients and families.
5. Provide resources to enable nurses working in radiation oncology to provide evidence-based patient education, symptom management, supportive care and care coordination.
6. Provide policies and systems which support the central role of the nurse in radiation oncology in providing education and support to patients about the treatment plan, the simulation process, expected outcomes, side effects (acute, late) and symptom management.
7. Support nurses' participation in research and other professional development activities that will advance knowledge and improve outcomes for people who receive radiotherapy.

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## Resources

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Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) C/Can 2025 Toolkit. Guiding principles for quality cancer treatment services in cities. [http://bit.ly/CCan2025\\_Toolkit](http://bit.ly/CCan2025_Toolkit); 2017. (Accessed Jan 25, 2017)

Practice Guidelines for the care of patients undergoing radiation therapy – Cancer Nurses Society of Australia and Epworth Hospital <https://www.cnsa.org.au/documents/item/241>