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Keynote lecture

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CANCER NURSING PRACTICE: STATE OF THE ART

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The overall incidence of and mortality from cancer has increased during the past 15 years. Each year there are 1,300,000 new cases of cancer in the European Union. Moreover, cancer is responsible for one quarter of all deaths in Europe. At the same time, survival rates for the most common tumours have increased slightly. Given these facts it is not surprising that more and more nurses have become involved in the care of patients with cancer.

In the practice setting oncology nurses may act in a variety of roles such as: direct care provider, researcher and manager. These roles are continuously influenced by changes like scarcity of financial resources, the evolution of multi-cultural societies, increased demands for quality care and quality of life, etcetera.

In the direct care setting many nurses have taken the opportunity to specialize in cancer care and have undertaken post graduate programmes

to prepare them to function as specialist oncology nurses. Demographic changes, changing attitudes and expectations of society mean that cancer prevention, health promotion, geriatric oncology, cancer as a family experience, complementary care and rehabilitation are challenging issues for nurses.

Nowadays oncology nurses may be involved in scientific nursing research or participate in medical studies. Since an increasing number of nurses are educated at masters or PhD level, the number of publications on cancer nursing research (e.g. symptom distress) is increasing steadily. Special attention is warranted for the implementation of the outcomes of nursing studies in the practice setting.

From a management point of view, standards of care, based on research and clinical practice, are (being) identified. This enables criteria for quality control to be developed. Cancer care delivery systems focus on continuity of care and early discharge planning. This has important implications for cancer nursing practice.

Oncology nursing is an important and established specialty in nursing. As this field continues to expand, the need to keep up to date is very apparent. The state of the art and science is changing continuously.