



Use These Resources to Delve Into Genetics

I know that I need to learn more about genetics and how it influences cancer development and treatment. I also know that I'm not alone; Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) membership surveys consistently find that nurses note "genetics" as a topic they feel they need to know more about. So, why aren't textbooks on genetics flying off the shelves? Why aren't conference presentations about genetics packed to the rafters?

Many reasons probably apply. One is the sheer enormity and complexity of the subject matter. I didn't like classes about genetics when I was in nursing school (25 years ago), and I still don't. Another reason why nurses like me are reluctant to get informed about genetics is the perception that the field of genetics is related only indirectly to clinical practice. If you are nodding your head and thinking that the topic of genetics is overwhelming, is incomprehensible, and does not pertain to what you do on a day-to-day basis in your practice, then this issue of *CJON* is for you.

Learning about genetics can be fun. Yes, the last word of that sentence was "fun." I downloaded the 32-page ONS tool kit *Genetics and Cancer Care: A Guide for Oncology Nurses* at no cost from ONS Online (www.ons.org, click Special Projects on the left sidebar, and select Genetics and Cancer Care Tool Kit) to learn more about the dreaded topic of genetics. I was prepared for a long, dull evening of reading but took the "Genetic Terms Quiz" on page 27 of the tool kit and found myself laughing out loud. Two definitions of each genetic term are provided, one correct and one humorous. For instance, readers are asked if a "telomere" is "a remote Russian space station" or "the extreme end of each chromosome." The tool kit is very well written and expertly illustrated with several

figures that summarize key points. Clinical examples of how genetics relates to practice are included as well.

Another enjoyable learning activity for me was taking the quiz that appears at the end of chapter one of the ONS textbook *Genetics in*



When you hear the word "carrier," does a naval ship filled with aircraft come to mind? If so, it's time to get informed about genetic influences and cancer.

Oncology Practice: Cancer Risk Assess-

ment (Tranin, Masny, & Jenkins, 2002). The quiz, "How Frequently Do You Use or Provide Genetics Information?" was an eye-opener for me. Simple things that clinicians do all the time, such as advising people to use sunscreen, actually are genetics-related activities. I was surprised to learn that. We have reprinted this book chapter, "Why Should Oncology Nurses Be Interested in Genetics?" in this issue (see pages 576–580) so you, too, can learn why oncology nurses should be interested in genetics and assess how often you provide genetics information in your daily practice. I think you will be surprised by how often you engage in genetics-related activities without realizing it.

ONS has developed two positions on genetics. "Cancer Predisposition Genetic Testing and Risk Assessment Counseling" and "The Role of the Oncology Nurse in Cancer Genetic Counseling" note how the gap between advances in genetics and their clinical application is narrowing and how all oncology nurses will be expected to provide infor-

mation about genetics related to cancer prevention, risk management, early detection, and cancer treatment. Both positions can be found on ONS Online (www.ons.org, select ONS Publications, and click on ONS Positions).

In this issue, the "Test Your Knowledge" column is titled "Understanding the Basics of Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer." Less than 10 years ago, the cancer susceptibility genes breast cancer gene 1 (*BRCA1*) and *BRCA2* were identified. Much has happened in the field of breast and ovarian cancer

treatment during the past decade that is directly attributable to identification of these genes. This issue's "Test Your Knowledge" column is interactive and prompts you to apply your genetics knowledge to clinical situations to which you can relate.

Do I know everything I need to know about genetic influences and cancer now that I have read the *Genetics and Cancer Care* tool kit, ONS positions, and the *Genetics in Oncology Practice* book? No. But I do know much more now than I did a few weeks ago, and, more importantly, I have learned that the topic of genetics is not one to be feared and avoided; it is one that is actually fun to learn about.

Reference

Tranin, A.S., Masny, A., & Jenkins, J. (2002). *Genetics in oncology practice: Cancer risk assessment*. Pittsburgh, PA: Oncology Nursing Society.

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