

QUESTION

How can a global experience enkindle a passion for oncology nursing?

Jingwen Zhang, BSN, RN, OCN®, is a clinical nurse coordinator at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle, WA. The author takes full responsibility for this content and did not receive honoraria or disclose any relevant financial relationships. Zhang can be reached at jzhang1@fredhutch.org, with copy to CJONEditor@ons.org.

I have had a broad global life experience. I was born in China and at the age of 11 years, my family decided that going to live with relatives in the United States was the best thing for me. I had to learn a new culture and language. In high school, I took advantage of an accelerated hybrid high school/college program and pursued a career in nursing. The profession was fulfilling at first, but over time the work became laborious and lost its meaning, and I was feeling burned out.

At this juncture, I took a leave to reconnect with my family in China and learn more about my ancestral roots. Coincident with my arrival in China, my uncle was diagnosed with esophageal cancer and my birth father with liver cancer. I learned much about how oncology care was provided in China.

Following the death of my uncle and the success of my birth father's treatment, I returned to the United States grateful to have rekindled a passion for nursing and desiring to attain a position in oncology. However, because I had no formal oncology experience, the process of getting a job was full of rejection and frustration. A friend referred me to a National Cancer Institute–designated cancer center where a new-to-specialty fellowship program for experienced nurses without an oncology background was beginning. My dream was about to come true.

I was selected to join a hematology-oncology unit at this National Cancer Institute–designated cancer center, which meant commuting about two hours each day. My team taught me how to approach symptom assessment, building my triaging and critical thinking skills. My journey was filled with what Chinese people would call *guiren*. These are people who lend you a hand when you need it the most. The NTS fellowship faculty

and my preceptors guided me in this transition to become an oncology nurse.

After a year, my manager encouraged me to chair the hematology onboarding committee to help improve orientation for employees in the department. I have grown so much by following my passion, and mentoring others is a privilege. Now I have earned my OCN®, and I celebrate this recognition of my oncology expertise.

Recently, I took my fiancé to China to meet my family. Seeing my birth father and how healthy he looked after his liver transplant was incredible. Personally, I have seen what it is like to lose a family member to cancer and to have a family member survive. Professionally, I am now an oncology nurse at a world-class research center. I have had a global view into the care of people with cancer, and it has inspired in me a sense of equity and justice for oncology nursing.

I am privileged to journey with patients and families through their oncology care. Working alongside an interprofessional team, we continually reach for the best possible outcome for everyone. The process of learning specialty oncology content and acquiring clinical expertise by participating in the new-to-specialty fellowship program has revitalized my career. I am no longer feeling burned out. A Chinese phrase applies to this process: *jiao xue xiang zhang*. It means “teachers are students; students are teachers.” You teach each other but also learn from each other, growing together.

How can one overcome feelings of burnout to rekindle a passion for professional nursing? It is a process of self-reflection, learning, and having the courage to try something new. The answer rests in knowing that this pursuit is a collaborative endeavor built on acknowledging and honoring your own experiences, being able to reflect on new opportunities as a meaningful foundation for change, and building relationships to grow together.

KEYWORDS

nurse burnout; global nursing; nursing fellowship; oncology specialty; career transition

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/24.CJON.232

RESOURCES

- **International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care**

Promotes the nurse's role in improving cancer care
<https://bit.ly/49QP5Qz>

- **Oncology Nursing Podcast**

Discusses the stressors that affect nurses
<https://bit.ly/3P5NH5i>

- **Oncology Nursing Society**

Details creation of a new-to-specialty RN fellowship
<https://bit.ly/48BISYM>