

Implementing a Hematology-Oncology Nurse Practitioner Fellowship



Across the United States there is a growing need for specialty providers who can care for an increasingly aging population, especially in oncology. At the same time, there is currently an increased demand for oncology services in the outpatient setting, including in long-term survivorship care.¹ Using nurse practitioners (NPs) to meet these needs can demonstrate improved patient satisfaction and treatment compliance, yielding fewer hospital admissions, as well as decreased lengths of hospital stays and readmission rates overall.² Nurse practitioners are well equipped to bridge this gap in cancer care and can improve patient outcomes by providing comprehensive, high-quality oncology and hematology care that is also cost effective.³⁻⁵ To optimally meet this demand for complex cancer care services, additional training and education must be provided to NPs.⁵

The Nurse Practitioner's Role at Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center

Within Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tenn., we employ a multitude of advanced practice providers (e.g., NPs and physician assistants) who care for our patients with cancer. Each cancer specialty within hematology and oncology includes physician and advanced practice teams who work in a multidisciplinary model of care. Depending on the specialty service, NPs care for a subset of

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identified patients. For example, in the outpatient breast surgical oncology department, NPs perform initial consultations to ensure that appropriate imaging, diagnostics, and coordination of services (i.e., chemotherapy, radiation, etc.) are performed prior to patients' surgeries. In our solid tumor oncology and hematology practices, an NP oversees follow-up care and accommodates acute-care visits throughout the week. Across the institution, NPs assist nursing team members with their research needs and any patient messages sent through digital channels, such as MyChart.

Development of the Hematology-Oncology Nurse Practitioner Fellowship

Development of the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center NP fellowship model was guided by the principles of transitions theory to ensure successful acclimation into proficient hematology and oncology providers.^{6,7} The NP fellowship was proposed by experienced oncology nurse practitioners who are often responsible for onboarding newly graduated advanced practice nurses. These highly specialized NPs approached administrative leaders with the idea of creating a hematology/oncology NP fellowship to deliver specialized oncology training and ensure successful transition into practice. Upon completion of the NP fellowship, leaders collaborate with candidates to consider provider positions within Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center. Factors considered in this review include professional feedback from fellowship coordinators, preceptors, and advanced practice leadership.

NP Fellowship Design

NP fellows are recruited to the program via a job posting, which lists criteria for application, on the Vanderbilt University Medical Center's career website. Additionally, current NPs and nursing leaders advertise the fellowship recruitment period throughout the institution. Applications are reviewed by advanced practice leadership and fellowship coordinators, who select candidates for stakeholder interviews. The fellowship program was developed in alignment with the American Nurses Credentialing Center criteria for certification of an NP fellowship program.⁸ Over a one-year period, NP fellows participate in essential program components, including:

- An advanced hematology and oncology curriculum
- 1,500-hour clinical immersion
- Professional and collaborative role development with a coordinator
- Evidence application to improve patient outcomes
- Scholarly exploration and dissemination of their work.

A doctoral, nurse practitioner, fellowship coordinator conducts direct oversight of the NP fellows. Additionally, the NP fellowship director oversees all fellows within Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Benchmarks for assessment include:

- Increased self-confidence and perceived self-competence
- Preceptor evaluations throughout each clinical rotation
- Participation in professional development opportunities
- Completion of the assigned advanced practice hematology and oncology curriculum.

NP Fellowship Outcomes

Within a two-month period, a total of 33 qualified NPs from across the United States applied for the Vanderbilt hematology/oncology NP fellowship program. The fellowship coordinators conducted a thorough review of applications and completed initial screening interviews. Selected candidates then underwent final interviews with key stakeholders.

Fellowship leaders interviewed a total of five NPs, which resulted in two extended offers for a fellowship position. After

completing the 12-month hematology/oncology fellowship program, both providers demonstrated improved self-confidence and were deemed proficient in practice across multiple cancer specialties by their advanced practice preceptors. Each NP successfully obtained permanent positions within inpatient and outpatient hematology/oncology practices, including the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center, as well as other academic settings.

Final Thoughts

Establishing a nurse practitioner fellowship requires professional collaboration among expert NPs and institutional leaders to ensure optimal implementation and evaluation of the program. Within hematology and oncology at Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center, the NP fellowship successfully transitioned qualifying providers into highly complex and specialized practice. The established curriculum ensured effective preparation, which resulted in advanced knowledge and clinical competency and improved provider self-confidence and perceived self-competence.



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