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# Ethical and Professional Values of Turkish Oncology Nurses

## Türk Onkoloji Hemşirelerinin Etik ve Profesyonel Değerleri

### ABSTRACT

#### Aim

This study aimed to determine the values that Turkish oncology nurses believe to be a guide for oncology nursing.

#### Method

The study was conducted by Turkish Oncology Nursing Association members, attended oncology nursing certification courses or working in oncology clinics. Survey forms were sent to the participants to their postal and e-mail addresses in the association records, and the forms were also delivered by hand to the courses organized by the subject. A total of 880 forms were sent and 521 complete forms were received. As the first part of the questionnaire form, six values suggested for oncology nursing were obtained through a literature review and were included in the study along with their explanations. As the second part of the questionnaire, 10 values derived from the ethical codes of oncology nurses (National Nursing Ethical Codes) were included. The oncology nurses evaluate the importance of these values using a four-point Likert scale.

#### Results

The study included 521 oncology nurses and reported the following values to be important: innovativeness, excellence, integrity, nurse advocacy, patient advocacy, and inclusiveness. Based on their preference, the participants reported the following ethical codes to be important for oncology nursing: innovativeness, informed consent, respect for individuals, loyalty, patient education, patient benefit, accurate information, respect for decisions, fair sharing, and honesty.

#### Conclusion

The most important professional nursing values according to the perspectives of nurses in Türkiye were identified. It is advisable to update core values and ethical codes in future studies.

#### Keywords

Culture, professional values, oncology nursing, values

## ÖZET

### Amaç

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türk onkoloji hemşirelerinin onkoloji hemşireliğine rehber olduğuna inandıkları değerleri belirlemektir.

### Yöntem

Araştırma, Onkoloji Hemşireliği Derneği üyeleri, onkoloji hemşireliği sertifika programına katılan ve onkoloji kliniklerinde çalışan hemşireler üzerinde yürütülmüştür. Anket formları katılımcılara dernek kayıtlarında yer alan posta, e-posta adreslerine gönderilmiş, derneğin düzenlediği kurslarda da formlar elden ulaştırılmıştır. Toplam 880 form gönderilmiş, 521 eksiksiz form alınmıştır. Anket formunun ilk bölümünde onkoloji hemşireliği için önerilen altı değer literatür taraması yapılarak elde edilmiş ve açıklamalarıyla birlikte çalışmaya dahil edilmiştir. Anketin ikinci bölümünde onkoloji hemşirelerinin etik kodlarından (Ulusal Hemşirelik Etik Kodları) elde edilen 10 değere yer verilmiştir. Onkoloji hemşireleri bu değerlerin önemini dördümlü Likert ölçeği kullanarak değerlendirmiştir.

### Bulgular

Çalışmaya 521 onkoloji hemşiresi katılmış ve yenilikçilik, mükemmellik, dürüstlük, hemşire savunuculuğu, hasta savunuculuğu ve kapsayıcılık değerlerinin önemli olduğu bildirilmiştir. Katılımcılar, yenilikçilik, bilgilendirilmiş onam, bireye saygı, sadakat, hasta eğitimi, hasta yararı, doğru bilgi, karara saygı, adil paylaşım ve dürüstlük etik kuralların onkoloji hemşireliği için önemli olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

### Sonuç

Türkiye'deki hemşirelerin bakış açılarına göre en önemli mesleki hemşirelik değerleri belirlendi. Gelecek çalışmalarda temel değerlerin ve etik kodların güncellenmesi önerilmektedir.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Değerler, kültür mesleki değerler onkoloji hemşireliği

#### What is known about the field

- Oncology nurses face many ethical situations in clinic setting. This environment are numerous components included both individual and professional values

#### Contribution of the article to the field

- It is important for oncology nurses to care for their patients in the light of professional and ethical values.
- Determining professional values in oncology nursing and teaching these values starting from student life is necessary for their positive reflection on patient care.

## INTRODUCTION

Occupational values provide the ability to define a common nursing mission, to give meaning to occupational practices, and to unite nurses within a common culture (1,2). Nurses can use occupational values while providing care, making decisions, or solving ethical problems. Internalizing occupational values ensures that conflicts are resolved; activities are performed in an order of priority; and safe, high quality, and ethical care is provided (2,3). Identifying occupational values may provide guide for training and applications intended for internalization of these values and may provide useful data for developing more effective strategies (4,5). In addition, by laying a foundation for nursing practices, professional values will guide nurses during their interactions with patients, colleagues, and the community (6). The American Nurses Association and International Council of Nurses have reached the consensus that the basic value to ensure the well-being of a healthy/sick individual is "usefulness." However, as a result of ethical studies, the following seven basic values were identified as core nursing values: altruism, aesthetics, equality, freedom, human dignity, justice, and righteousness (7).

The objectives of oncology nursing are to prevent cancer in society, enable individuals to attain a healthy way of life, ensure that patients diagnosed with cancer and their families can maintain the highest functionality level, and improve their quality of life (8). Although these objectives that shape and guide oncology nursing need to recognize the requirements of patients with cancer and respond to their needs, they also need teamwork in oncology and the sharing of information and experience among team members. These fundamental objectives also included research and education for the development of cancer care. Occupational values, which are guidelines of the profession, will considerably contribute to achieving these objectives in oncology nursing because they encourage and serve as a guide for personal development and they can be help achieve the goals of high quality cancer care (8).

In this context, it is very important for an oncology nurse needs to understand the values of oncology nursing. However, first, the values of oncology nursing need to be identified, and a consensus regarding these values should be reached. Therefore, various professional organizations have made efforts to determine values of oncology nursing. For example, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) in America reported the following core values: integrity, innovation, management, advocacy, excellence, and inclusiveness (9). The European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS) reported inclusiveness, supportiveness, reliability, skillfulness, and efficacy as values of oncology nursing (10). The Moffitt Cancer Center in America has determined the following nursing values: Clinical excellence, professional and ethical

behavior, healthy and effective collaboration, work/life balance, respect, community service, stewardship (11).

The James Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Care determined the following nursing values as world Class, empowered, compassionate, accountable, respectful and expert (12). As can be seen, international professional organizations and several cancer centers have identified core values of oncology nursing.

By determining the values of oncology nursing, the fundamental objectives of oncology nursing may be achieved. However, similar to personal values, occupational values can also vary according to the sensitivity, culture, and needs of the society, community, or group from where they are obtained. In Türkiye, there are no defined values of nursing and oncology nursing. Thus, determining nursing values that differ according to the culture, needs, and sensitivities of the country is important. Based on this fact and with the support of ONS Türkiye, we planned a nation-wide study in Türkiye, which acts as a bridge between Europe and Asia, to determine values that oncology nurses believe to be a guide for oncology nursing. These values would then be submitted to ONS for use.

## METHODS

### Study Design

Descriptive cross-sectional study

### Setting and Sample

The study was conducted between March and December 2010 and included ONS members, participants of oncology nursing certification courses, and nurses working in oncology clinics (in 2010, the number of certified oncology nurses was 574 and that of ONS members was 600). The study did not involve a specific sample selection process; instead, forms were distributed to individuals via postal or email addresses listed in the association records. Additionally, participants attending courses organized by the association were provided with the form and requested to complete it. The number of questionnaire forms sent out to the participants was 880, and the number of forms submitted by participants was 545 (68.1%). The questionnaire forms were delivered by mail, e-mail, or hand. Twenty-four questionnaires were excluded from the study because 14 of the submitted forms were filled out by nurses with no oncology experience, ONS membership, or chemotherapy certificate and 10 were not completely filled and contained only sociodemographic characteristics.

### Ethical Consideration

This study was approved by Kocaeli Clinical Researches Ethics Committee (Approval no 12.15.2009. KKA EK 2009/29). The principles of the Declaration of Helsinki were followed in the study. The participants were

informed that participation was voluntary and that completing and submitting the form implied that they were providing informed consent.

### Measurements/Instruments

The questionnaire form comprised two parts. In the first part, six values suggested for ONS were obtained through a literature review and were included in the study with their explanations (1,4,5,7). These values included innovativeness, excellence, integrity, nurse advocacy, Patient advocacy. In the second part, 10 values derived from the ethical codes of oncology nurses (National Nursing Ethical Code) were included. These ethical codes are innovativeness, informed consent, respect for individual, loyalty, patient education, patient benefit, accurate information, respect for decision, fair sharing, honesty.

### Data collection/Procedure

The study was conducted Oncology Nursing Society members, participants of oncology nursing certification courses, and nurses working in oncology clinics. Survey forms were sent to the participants to their postal and e-mail addresses in the association records, and the forms were also delivered by hand to the courses organized by the subject. A total of 880 forms were sent and 521 complete forms were received. As the first part of the questionnaire form, six values suggested for oncology nursing were obtained through a literature review and were included in the study along with their explanations. As the second part of the questionnaire, 10 values derived from the ethical codes of oncology nurses (National Nursing Ethical Codes) were included. The oncology nurses were asked to evaluate the importance of these values using a four-point Likert scale (0, not important at all; 1, somewhat important; 2, important; and 3, very important). Oncology nurses were asked about the codes they suggested in addition to the codes mentioned above.

### Data Analysis

SPSS package program 17.0 version of the were used. Data percentage distributions were calculated.

## RESULTS

### Preferences of Oncology Nurses regarding Values of Oncology Nursing

In the first part of the questionnaire form, the oncology nurses were questioned about how important they found the six values suggested for oncology nursing. Table 1 shows the Oncology nurses revealed that the values of innovativeness, excellence, integrity, nurse advocacy, patient advocacy, and inclusiveness were important.

### Preferences of Oncology Nurses Regarding Ethical Codes of Oncology Nursing

In the second part of the questionnaire form, the nurses were asked about their thoughts regarding 10 ethical codes suggested for oncology nursing. Based on the preferences of the oncology nurses, the following ethical codes were reported to be important for oncology nursing: innovativeness, informed consent, respect for individual, loyalty, patient education, patient benefit, accurate information, respect for decision, fair sharing, and honesty (Table-2).

In addition to the abovementioned codes, the oncology nurses suggested the following codes:

- An oncology nurse should carefully perform registration processes and should get under control all the treatment, care, and education provided using a registration system.
- An oncology nurse should help patients with cancer and their families in relieving pain and suffering, which are one of the biggest problems for such patients.
- An oncology nurse should prepare patients with cancer and their families for eventual death if applicable and should provide emotional and psychological support if required.
- An oncology nurse should be able to empathize with patients and provide treatment and care while empathizing with them.
- An oncology nurse should also consider his/her own physical–emotional–mental health while working with patients with cancer and should seek support if necessary.
- The duties, powers, and responsibilities of an oncology nurse are determined by regulations, and care for patients with cancer should be conducted within the boundaries of these regulations.
- An oncology nurse should make an effort to have the necessary economic and intellectual skills to improve the value attributed to him/her.
- An oncology nurse should determine independent functions of nursing profession and should aim to take necessary training for self-improvement.
- An oncology nurse should be patient, quick, and loveable.
- An oncology nurse should consider patients with cancer and their families; consider difficulties outside the hospital, at home, and in social life; and inform patients and their families about difficulties.

**Table 1.** Priorities of oncology nurses regarding values

| Values of Oncology Nursing  |                             |                           |                  |                       |              |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
|   | <i>Not important at all</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Important</i> | <i>Very Important</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|   | <i>n (%)</i>                | <i>n (%)</i>              | <i>n (%)</i>     | <i>n (%)</i>          | <i>n (%)</i> |
| <b>Innovativeness:</b> As ONS and its members, for every case, we strive to renew existing knowledge and increase creativity. When improvements are observed in the care of patients with cancer, we attempt to immediately apply this information. We believe that lifelong learning is fundamental for personal and professional development of oncology nurses | 1(0.2)                      | 3(0.6)                    | 66 (13.07)       | <b>435 (86,13)</b>    | 505(100,0)   |
| <b>Excellence:</b> As ONS and its members, we strive for excellence in the clinical field, research, education, and practice. We believe that evidence-based care is necessary for the excellence of nursing. We provide various types of support for patients with cancer to ensure high standards of nursing care.  | 1(0.2)                      | 6 (1.2)                   | 105 (20.54)      | <b>399 (78.08)</b>    | 511(100,0)   |
| <b>Integrity:</b> As ONS and its members, we maintain and develop trust by acting in an honest, reconciliatory, and ethical manner toward all parties without compromising on professionalism in our professional and personal relationships.   | 1(0.2)                      | 3 (0.6)                   | 109 (21.4)       | <b>396 (77.8)</b>     | 509(100,0)   |
| <b>Nurse advocacy:</b> As ONS and its members, we support and advocate for the rights of oncology nurses to ensure their reputation, recognition, access to trainings, safe work environment, and fair wages.   | 2(0.4)                      | 7(1.4)                    | 111 (21.8)       | <b>389 (76.4)</b>     | 509(100,0)   |
| <b>Patient advocacy:</b> As ONS and its members, we advocate for the rights of patients with cancer to increase their quality of life and ensure that they receive excellent healthcare. With respect to national policies on cancer diagnosis, treatment, and care, we act to protect the rights of patients with cancer.  | 1(0.2)                      | 9 (1.8)                   | 114 (22.4)       | <b>385 (75.6)</b>     | 509(100,0)   |
| <b>Inclusiveness:</b> As ONS and its members, we care about the diversity of individuals and their thoughts and support this diversity without any discrimination. We provide equal opportunities for all who are in need to benefit from ONS services.   | 2(0.2)                      | 12 (2,34)                 | 133 (26.3)       | <b>364 (71.2)</b>     | 511(100,0)   |

**Table 2.** Priorities of oncology nurses regarding ethical codes

| Ethical Codes of Oncology Nursing  |                             |                           |                  |                       |              |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
|  | <i>Not important at all</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Important</i> | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|  | <i>n (%)</i>                | <i>n (%)</i>              | <i>n (%)</i>     | <i>n (%)</i>          | <i>n (%)</i> |
| <b>Code 8. Innovativeness:</b> An oncology nurse is innovative with regard to cancer diagnosis, treatment, and care.   | -                           | 6 (1.2)                   | 75 (14.8)        | <b>426 (84.0)</b>     | 507 (100,0)  |
| <b>Code 3. Informed consent:</b> An oncology nurse clearly informs patients with cancer before implementing nursing practices for the physical integrity of such patients. She/he ensures volunteerism by obtaining verbal or sometimes written consent. | 1 (0.2)                     | 4(0.8)                    | 86 (16.6)        | <b>426 (82.4)</b>     | 517(100,0)   |
| <b>Code 1. Respect for individuals:</b> An oncology nurse believes in the uniqueness and preciousness of a patient with cancer and respects their differences and thoughts.  | -                           | 3(0.6)                    | 95(18.4)         | <b>417(81)</b>        | 515 (100,0)  |
| <b>Code 2. Loyalty:</b> An oncology nurse provides nursing services by considering, as part of their responsibility of commitment, the beliefs, values, and needs of patients.   | -                           | 7(1.0)                    | 115 (22.0)       | <b>394 (77.0)</b>     | 516 (100,0)  |
| <b>Code 9. Patient education:</b> An oncology nurse takes responsibility in educating patients with cancer about the disease, care, and their rights, thus creating opportunities for patients and their families to be informed about cancer.           | 1(0.2)                      | 11 (2.1)                  | 111(21.5)        | <b>394 (76.2)</b>     | 517(100,0)   |
| <b>Code 5. Patient benefit:</b> An oncology nurse gives primary importance to the benefit of patients during cancer treatment and care.  | -                           | 4(0.8)                    | 122 (23.8)       | <b>387 (75.4)</b>     | 513 (100,0)  |
| <b>Code 6. Accurate information:</b> An oncology nurse helps and encourages patients to obtain accurate information regarding cancer treatment and care.   | 1(0.2)                      | 5 (1.0)                   | 126 (24.7)       | <b>378 (74.1)</b>     | 510 (100,0)  |
| <b>Code 4. Respect for decision:</b> An oncology nurse respects the rights of patients with cancer to make a choice and decision about their care and even treatment and ensures that other individuals also show respect.                               | 2(0.4)                      | 4(0.8)                    | 133 (25.7)       | <b>378 (73.1)</b>     | 517 (100,0)  |
| <b>Code 10. Fair sharing:</b> An oncology nurse ensures a fair distribution of time, effort, and other sources in accordance with the requirements of patients with cancer while providing them service.   | -                           | 11(2.1)                   | 129 (25.0)       | <b>376 (72.9)</b>     | 516 (100,0)  |
| <b>Code 7. Honesty:</b> An oncology nurse is honest even in situations when the benefit of the patient is less than the troubles he/she has to endure and also ensures that his/her team is honest.  | 6 (1)                       | 10 (2.0)                  | 154 (30.0)       | <b>345 (67.0)</b>     | 515 (100,0)  |

## DISCUSSION

In this study, oncology nurses determined the following values to be important: innovativeness, excellence, integrity, nurse advocacy, patient advocacy, and inclusiveness. Oncology is a field with continuous development, particularly with regard to technology. The fact that oncology nurses reported innovativeness to be important suggested that oncology nurses are highly interested in following innovations and putting them into practice.

A study of 282 nurses working outside oncology revealed that human dignity (25.2%), accuracy (23.4%), freedom (21.6%), fairness (9.9%), aesthetics (9.9%), and altruism and equality (5%) were the core values that were considered important (13). The American Nursing Professional Values Scale (NPVS) validity and reliability study (5) determined the following occupational values to be important: care giving, taking action, responsibility,

integrity, accuracy, freedom, security, and knowledge. In the study the following values were considered to be important in order of priority: human dignity (35%), followed by equality (24.2%), accuracy (21.1%), altruism (9.9%), fairness (5.2%), aesthetics (2.3%), and freedom (2.2%) (14). In the study conducted using NPVS, the most important occupational values for nurses were human dignity and autonomy (15). Furthermore, according to another study conducted, the important occupational values were impartiality, happiness, equality, reliability, openness to change, confidentiality, loyalty, and respect for human dignity (16). Regarding the current study results, similarity with those of the previous study was observed only with regard to the value of openness to change. Studies have suggested that occupational nursing values change according to different countries and cultures (17-20).

Based on their preference, oncology nurses reported the following ethical codes to important for oncology nursing: innovativeness, informed consent, respect for individuals, adherence, patient education, patient benefit, accurate information, respect for decision, fair sharing, and honesty. Similar to the values considered important, innovativeness was also considered the most important among all ethical codes. In our country, the ethical codes accepted by the Turkish Nurses Association are the principles of non-maleficence-beneficence, autonomy, respect for individuals, justice and equality, privacy, and confidentiality; this ranking demonstrated that the ethical code preferences of oncology nurses were different from those determined for nursing in our country.

It is thought-provoking that although ethical codes of informed consent and respect for individuals are considered highly important by oncology nurses, honesty is considered least important. In Türkiye, the tendency of physicians to not be truthful to patients has been reported in many studies (21). Here although nurses obtained informed consent from patients during their applications, the inability of being ethical honest with patients who do not know the exact diagnosis may have caused this contradictory result. However, nurses have a fundamental duty to defend patients with cancer, especially those who are vulnerable. In addition to establishing an honest relationship with patients, the ability of establishing proper relationships with colleagues also depends on the ethical practices of physicians.

While altruism was found to be highly important in the study by Shih et al. it was found to be of low importance in the studies by Rassin and Erkus and Dinc (16,22-23). In our study, the importance of patient benefit was ranked sixth among other ethical codes.

The priority order of values in our study was different from that of other studies. In addition, while some common values are prioritized in our study and in other studies, differences do exist. These results suggested that values are subjective, and the influence of community, school, and culture may vary over time. In the literature review, no study focused on determining value priorities of oncology nurses in the world and in our country. Therefore, studies conducted in various countries and Türkiye were included in the discussion. However, because the sample included in the studies conducted in Türkiye covers only a single city and hospital, it cannot be generalized to the whole country. In our study, the sample included nurses working in every region of Türkiye, constituting a more heterogeneous group. In addition, since most value studies are conducted using a scale, an average score is given and does not reflect value priorities.

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with the anticipation that determining core values of oncology nursing will be useful in terms of identifying values that would be more easily adopted by nurses in our country, would contribute to training and planning of the Oncology Nursing Association in Türkiye, and contribute to determining approaches and expectations of patients toward oncology nurses. The obtained results revealed that oncology nurses considered innovativeness to be the most important value and ranked innovativeness, excellence, integrity, nurse advocacy, patient advocacy, and inclusiveness as the core oncology nursing values. In terms of ethical codes, the highest importance was reported for innovativeness, and the ethical codes were ranked as follows: innovativeness, informed consent, respect for individual, loyalty, patient education, patient benefit, accurate information, respect for decision, fair sharing, and honesty. However, within the context of rapidly changing biomedicine applications and with respect to oncology nurses who give the highest importance to innovativeness, it is recommended that core values and ethical codes be updated in future studies. In order to improve the professional ethics and values of oncology nurses, it may be recommended to implement courses and in-service training programs and encourage them to participate in scientific meetings.

## Author Contribution

Conceptualization: SAT, AA, FG, NE; Design: AA, FG, NE; Counselling: SAT, AA, FG, NE; Data Gathering/Processing: SAT, FG; Analysis/Interpration: SAT, AA, NE; Literature Review: SAT, AA, FG, NE; Writing: SAT, AA, FG, NE; Critical Review: SAT, AA, FG, NE

## Conflict of Interest

There is no any conflict of interest.

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