



## **The Critical Success Factors and Core Competencies Required for a Best Practice in Oncology Home Care**

*Meg Maley RN, BSN,  
Senior Vice President, Clinical Product Development, WellDoc, Inc.  
Founder, Oncology Care Home Health*

*The capabilities required to deliver appropriate care to the oncology patient in the home care setting are not for the faint hearted.* The Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC) recognized the importance and growing need of this population and developed specific guidelines for the oncology patient. They state that the “agency must be accredited and must provide the following multidisciplinary services:

- Oncology nursing
- Clinical nutrition
- Pharmacy
- Psychosocial services
- Rehabilitation services
- Spiritual support
- Home health aide/homemaker services”

They further state the “agency must have written policies and procedures for care of the cancer patient, which are compatible with those of the referring institution” and that “the home health agency staff is capable of providing appropriate and competent care for cancer patients and their families at any stage of the disease.”

The rationale is quite obvious: the care of the cancer patient requires specialized knowledge, expertise and skill. Experienced oncology staff nurses and oncology social workers should be available to care for or consult on the care of the cancer patient at home. Furthermore, the clinical team must have the tools and ongoing professional development to remain knowledgeable about current clinical needs and practices.

The essential components of an oncology home care specialty program should focus heavily on the home care delivery “team”. This clinically specialized group should live the philosophy: “Oncology is all we do, all day, everyday.” The most successful teams have a program leader (manager) who is a seasoned manager and certified oncology nurse. They also include a staff of home health aides, therapists, medical social workers, nutritionists, and nurses; all of whom have been intensively trained in oncology, including an extensive orientation.

In such a program, standardized care should be practiced according to Oncology Clinical Practice Guidelines. A clinical nurse specialist should be on staff and staff RNs should be oncology certified with management support/incentives.

Key ingredients also include:

- *Intensified lab value management* that acknowledges the critical importance of drawing and processing time sensitive and STAT labs. RNs should be educated as to the importance of understanding lab values and should be able to speak intelligently to the physician's office regarding results and changes.
- *Intensified medication management* that focuses on implementing systems to process frequent medication changes (IV and oral) and provides current medication lists to staff as needed. The oncology staff should be positioned to anticipate changes and respond quickly and appropriately.
- *On-call coverage* that ensures that oncology nurses are available 24 hours a day and are able to triage urgent care needs (e.g.: oncologic emergencies) at all times. Regularly updated orders (especially patient medication lists) and symptom triaging algorithms should be utilized by the on-call RN to facilitate rapid, appropriate response to patient needs.
- *IV certification by all nurses*. Since roughly 40 percent of all home based oncology patients have IV needs, all RNs should be IV and chemo certified and all should be proficient with central lines and blood product administration.
- *The availability of clinical "sub-specialists"* which greatly strengthens the team and enhances the care available to patients. Subspecialties may address some of the more common areas of clinical need including lymphedema management, post-breast surgery care, pain management, and wound/ ostomy care. These clinicians (often a combination of nurses and therapists) can serve as clinical resources to the team, and can develop referral relationships with appropriate physicians, hospitals and cancer centers. They may also serve on interdisciplinary committees and programs at partner or referral organizations.

*A range of tools are also required to provide the necessary support to the oncology home care delivery team:*

| <b>SUPPORT TOOLS FOR THE ONCOLOGY TEAM</b>  |
|---|
| Oncology orientation modules and training (multidisciplinary and including post-tests for competency) |
| Oncology clinical practice guidelines (outcomes driven)   |
| Oncology patient education tools (derived from clinical practice guidelines)                          |
| Oncology telephone triage tools   |
| Oncology clinical policies and procedures   |
| Oncology nurse resource guide (helpful daily hints)   |
| Sales and marketing guidelines  |
| Ongoing clinical education and program updating   |

In summary, oncology specialty home care offers a significant opportunity to home care providers who are well prepared with the skills and tools to meet the specific needs of the oncology patient.

---

*Oncology Care Home Health, LLC is a comprehensive product licensing, education and consulting company dedicated to helping home health providers implement specialized oncology home care programs.*

*Visit our website at [www.ochomehealth.com](http://www.ochomehealth.com) or contact us at 734.658.6162.*