Nursing Research Unit for Cancer Care

A project for the development of a research and teaching unit for cancer care in cooperation with the Comprehensive Cancer Center of the Medical University of Vienna and the Vienna General Hospital (AKH Wien).

Summary
April 2014

Projectsupervision: Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Hanna Mayer, Department of Nursing Science
Co-Investigator: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Christoph Zielinski, Comprehensive Cancer Center Vienna, Medical University Vienna, Vienna General Hospital
Prof. Manuela Eicher, BScN, MScN, PhD, Department of Nursing Sciences Fribourg, Switzerland
Sponsor: University of Vienna
Timeframe: July 2013 until April 2015
1 Current state

Due to increasing survival rates (Statistik Austria 2012) and longer duration of the disease, cancer has nowadays been given the status of a chronic disease. The diagnosis and treatment, but also the long-term effects can be a serious burden for patients and may cause psychosocial changes. Therefore, oncology diseases require a long-term and comprehensive response, coordinated by several health professionals and expanded psycho-social care (Bahti, 2010; Busse, Blümel, Scheller-Kreinsen & Zentner, 2010; Griffith, McGuire & Russo, 2010). The role of the nurse in this process can for example increase quality of life and optimise therapy results of cancer patients. Preconditions for such positive effects are a profound understanding of the special physical and psychological situation of the patients as well as advice and education of the patients and their relatives for the increasing ambulant and home-based treatment and care (Bachmann-Mettler & Eicher, 2011; Newhouse et al., 2011; Preyde & Synnott, 2009). It is therefore necessary that (1) nurses rely on empirical knowledge in their practice and (2) are well-prepared for the special treatment of cancer patients because they've received relevant education and training courses at an international level (Wyatt, 2007).

Academic efforts into nursing practice for oncology patients is directed at clinical research, in which the main focus is on the patients and their relatives, as well as the interdisciplinary character of nursing and medicine. The Department of Nursing Science of the University of Vienna is the only academic institute in Austria currently performing focused research in the area of oncology care in the form of projects, dissertations and master thesis’. It is however important to note that the Department of Nursing Science of the University of Vienna is a part of the Faculty of Social Sciences and with that background does have a complicated context for clinical oncology nursing research. Therefore, the Department of Nursing Science has a long-standing cooperation on a project basis with the Vienna General Hospital (AKH), the Medical University of Vienna (MUW) and the Comprehensive Cancer Center Vienna (CCC)\(^1\). To guarantee the development of excellence in research and education in the future, a more institutionalised cooperation will be needed as well as a larger framework which will go beyond the current project-related cooperation and therewith open doors to funding and international publications.

The current state of Austria in terms of education programmes in this field is as follows: A specific course on oncology care is possible after the successful termination of the main nursing course as stated in § 64 Health- and Nursing Law (Weiss-Faßbinder & Lust, 2006). As this course was established outside of the higher education sector, there is currently no tertiary education programme available. Such a programme could however have a positive effect on patient care. (Busse et al., 2010; De Geest et al., 2008; Delamaire & Lafortune, 2010).

\(^1\) The CCC Vienna is a center for research and treatment of cancer patients in accordance with international standards, in which the competences of different disciplines in the area of oncology are combined.
In summary, the current state of the oncology nursing research and teaching in Austria and the increasing demands on this field make it very clear that

1. oncology nursing research should be embodied in a clinical interdisciplinary setting and
2. specialised, oncology nursing education should be available in the tertiary sector,

are necessary to provide good care to patients in a growing needs sector to continue to improve and develop the nursing of these patients. Therefore the Department of Nursing Science of the University of Vienna, together with the Comprehensive Cancer Center of the Medical University Vienna and the Vienna General Hospital is working towards the foundation of an academic nursing research and training unit for oncology care at the CCC. To achieve this goal, the University of Vienna already financed a first development project.

2 Aim of the project

Goal of the development and establishment of a Nursing Research Unit is to create an institution that goes beyond regular project-based cooperation between the Department of Nursing Science of the University of Vienna and the Comprehensive Cancer Center Vienna of the Medical University of Vienna at the Vienna General Hospital. This Nursing Research Unit should become an independent academic nursing competence center for oncology nursing research and teaching at the CCC.

3 Strategies and Measures needed to establish the Nursing Research Unit

To establish the Nursing Research Unit for the areas of research and teaching several measures need to be taken, which can be divided into different area's:

1. the development of a general framework for the Nursing Research Unit and a finance plan for the first five years,
2. the development of a research profile and a research strategy for the Nursing Research Unit and
3. the development of a formal construct and a framework curriculum for the academic education of oncology nursing staff for the Nursing Research Unit.
3.1 Development of a general framework and a finance plan

A framework for the Nursing Research Unit has to be created in which the institutional integration of the Unit at the Comprehensive Cancer Center Vienna, the concrete form of cooperation between the universities (University of Vienna and the Medical University of Vienna), the role of the Department of Nursing Science in the Nursing Research Unit and the staffing conditions are determined. A first step in this direction was the organisation and implementation of a survey within the institutions involved and the relevant stakeholders from the health care sector.

Furthermore it is important to create a finance plan for the Nursing Research Unit, which consists of a permanent basic funding and a start-up funding for the first five years.

3.2 Development of a research profile and a research strategy

The research profile and research strategy have to be developed on three levels, notably the meso, macro and micro level.

At the meso level a general agenda for oncology nursing research was developed. As there is currently only one example within the German speaking area, notably in Switzerland (Shaha et al., 2008), this agenda should first and foremost create a framework for the Austrian research in this area. To connect the research agenda to international research priorities as well as national problems and characteristics, it was important to include international sources as well as the knowledge of national experts. A systematic literature research as well as a Delphi Study have been completed.

On the macro level, the research agenda will be used to create a research plan with priorities for the first five years of the Nursing Research Unit at the CCC. As the research agenda is formulated for the general Austrian system, it is necessary to specify the agenda to fit the system and needs of the clinical practice and research necessities at the Vienna General Hospital in particular. To achieve this specification, a focus group with oncology nurses at the Vienna General Hospital was carried out. In the next step, it is necessary to discuss the results of the focus group in relevant expert panels of the Vienna General Hospital, the Medical University Vienna, the CCC and the Department of Nursing Science and to further develop it into a five-year research plan.

At the micro level it is necessary to transform the five year plan of the Nursing Research Unit into several concrete research projects.

3.3 Development of a formal construct and a framework curriculum for the academic degree

The formal construct and framework curriculum for the academic education entails amongst others defining the type of study programme (consecutive vs. non-consecutive), the study degrees (Bachelor, Master), the admission requirements for the study programme, the amount of ECTS awarded by the study program, its compatibility with already existing study programmes in nursing science in regular
higher education and the currently available training programmes in oncology nursing within the secondary sector. International models, Best Practice examples and the Advanced Nursing Practice concept are considered for the development of the curriculum. Besides the focus on a national target group orientation, special attention is paid to the possibility of international connections.

**Literature**


