Historically, the first form of cancer treatment offered to patients was the surgical removal of solid tumours. Surgical oncology is the branch of cancer care that utilizes surgery and interventional procedures to diagnose and treat cancer. Surgical interventions can be classified as preventative, prophylactic, diagnostic, curative, palliative, supportive and/or restorative.

Over the last 100 years, advances in surgical oncology have led to improved patient survival. Advanced surgical techniques successfully remove tumours while preserving physical function and offering improved quality of life. For many people with non-metastatic cancer, surgical interventions offer the greatest chance for cure.

The outcomes of surgical interventions are often directly related to the quality of care provided by the entire inter-professional team. Surgical oncology nurses play a critical role in affecting these outcomes through their complex and specialized assessments, interventions and evaluations of care. Moreover, patient/family teaching and supportive care pre- and post-surgery are fundamental activities for surgical oncology nurses. Understanding the impact of surgical interventions for patients and their family members by nurses assists in establishing realistic and person-centred goals of care. In addition to understanding the concepts and implications of surgery, appreciating the role and impact of neo-adjuvant and adjuvant treatments such as radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and biologic therapy is imperative.

Surgical oncology as a nursing specialty and its importance in the care of cancer patients continues to evolve. Surgical oncology nurses require specialized knowledge and skill to care for patients with various types of cancers. Nurses have the opportunity to develop this specialty within operating rooms, critical care, surgical and medical/surgical units, ambulatory cancer centres, as well as in community and rehabilitation settings.

Rapidly advancing scientific and technologic methods in the field of surgery have led to the growth of nursing research in this clinical area and to subsequent evidence-based practice changes. These have contributed to the advancement of surgical oncology nursing.

CANO acknowledges the specialty of oncology nursing and surgical oncology nursing within that broader specialty. The association has developed and supports a Surgical Oncology Nursing Special Interest Group (SIG). The goals of this SIG include:
- To promote and develop surgical oncology nursing as a specialty
- To promote collaboration throughout Canada among surgical oncology nurses in practice, education, administration, and research
- To provide a forum for nurses to exchange ideas, knowledge, and skills related to the specialty of surgical oncology
- To promote improving the quality of care for patients experiencing surgical interventions for their cancer.

The future goals and projects of the surgical oncology nursing SIG will be driven by issues and needs identified by our members. We continue to build our membership within this SIG.

If you are interested in joining the Surgical Oncology Nursing SIG, please join via the CANO website or while obtaining your CANO membership.

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