

PERSONAL REFLECTION

How CANO membership fosters foundational leadership qualities throughout undergraduate study: A reflection on the 29th Annual CANO Conference

by Sarah Jane Quinn

As a third-year undergraduate nursing student, I once thought that leadership was something I would not be considering for years to come. As the recipient of the 2017 Student Travel Grant to attend the 29th Annual Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (CANO) Conference in Gatineau, Ottawa, I found my understanding of nursing leadership changing throughout the conference. Because of the conference, I came to understand that an individual can begin to lay a foundation for leadership as early as undergraduate study. I also realized that most of my leadership development thus far has been possible thanks to the opportunities that CANO student membership has made available to me.

The 2017 CANO Conference taught me how personal development is the foundation to being a good leader. I learned of the CANO Nursing Leadership Position Statement at the conference. This position statement recognizes the necessity of leadership for each oncology nurse (Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology, 2016, p. 1). This position statement includes the LEADS in a Caring Environment framework, which includes a section on "Leading Self" (LEADS Canada, 2017). The Leading Self section states that individuals must be continuously developing themselves to become leaders (2017). In this way, each active CANO member is developing their own potential for leadership, including student members.

CANO membership has given me the opportunity to venture independently outside of my nursing student cohort. Professional development outside of my undergraduate study has pushed the

limits of my comfort zone and, thus, has helped me to grow not only as a nursing student, but also as a person. Prior to attending the whole 2017 CANO Conference, I attended the Student Networking Event at the 28th Annual CANO Conference where I was able to network with nurses in my field of interest for the first time. Also, as a member of the Oncology Nursing Interest Group-Alberta (ONIGA) CANO Chapter, I have been able to attend numerous education events where I have networked with nurses and learned about topics such as immunotherapy and management of metastatic breast cancer. Through ONIGA I have immersed myself into a nursing community that provides me with support and motivation to pursue oncology nursing. With the CANO Student Travel Grant, my attendance at the 29th CANO Conference furthered my professional and personal development, since I was able to meet and learn from nurses across Canada.

The lectures and sessions at the CANO Conference helped me gain a deeper understanding of the content being presented, and how it inspires me, as a nurse. For example, Fay Strochschein's lectureship focused on older adults and the complexity of their decision-making in regards to cancer treatment. It deepened my understanding of why I find this particular population within oncology so interesting. These "a-ha" moments at the conference excited me because they provided me with a vision of where and how I want to make changes in my career. In regards to the "how" piece, the conference brought to my attention the implications of nursing research. Specifically, at the Speed Mentoring to Enhance Oncology Nursing Research session, I received advice from the CANO research committee about how to pursue research in my career and I saw that research is a great outlet for a nurse to create change and, thus, be a leader.

In addition to CANO showing me the importance of growing as an individual, CANO has also taught me how nursing leaders are successful when they acknowledge that they belong to a community consisting of nurses with differing expertise. The conference was a great example of this, as nurses from across the country came to not only share their knowledge, but also to gain more knowledge from one another. It was inspiring to see nurses who have worked years in their field learning from nurses who had less experience in the field, and vice versa. CANO demonstrates that the best oncology nursing leaders work together.

Moving forward, I hope to demonstrate leadership, as a student, by inspiring other undergraduate nursing students to become CANO members. My membership has given me a sense of purpose in my studies since I am continuously witnessing through CANO the great work that my degree will enable me to accomplish. Also, without CANO membership I never would have been able to solve a murder mystery while enjoying a delicious meal or pose in a photo booth decorated in a feather boa beside two well-accomplished nurses. If that is not a convincing argument to become a CANO member, I don't know what is.

Editor's note: This year's CANO Conference will be held in Prince Edward Island. Information about the Student Travel Awards to attend the conference is available on the CANO Website.

REFERENCES

- Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (2016). *Nursing leadership position statement*. Retrieved from https://cymcdn.com/sites/canomalachite-mgmt.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/position_statements/09-16_EN_CANO_Nurs_Leadershi.pdf
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