

FOUNDATIONAL SKILL BUILDING FOR BEGINNERS: ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR ONCOLOGY SOCIAL WORK

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BACKGROUND

From 2024 to 2034, demand for social workers is projected to grow by over 6%, with 74,000 openings annually. The need for specialized oncology social workers will continue to rise due to increasing healthcare demands, the complexity of cancer treatment and associated psychosocial challenges. Preparing new oncology social workers with focused and specialized training is essential to effectively support patients and families affected by cancer.

Our comprehensive orientation program is designed for oncology social workers with less than three years of experience in the field. It equips participants with practical and effective tools to address the psychosocial aspects of cancer care, including high risk and distress screening, psychosocial assessments, multidisciplinary care planning, case management, care barrier reduction, group work, supportive counseling and linkage to community services.

OBJECTIVES

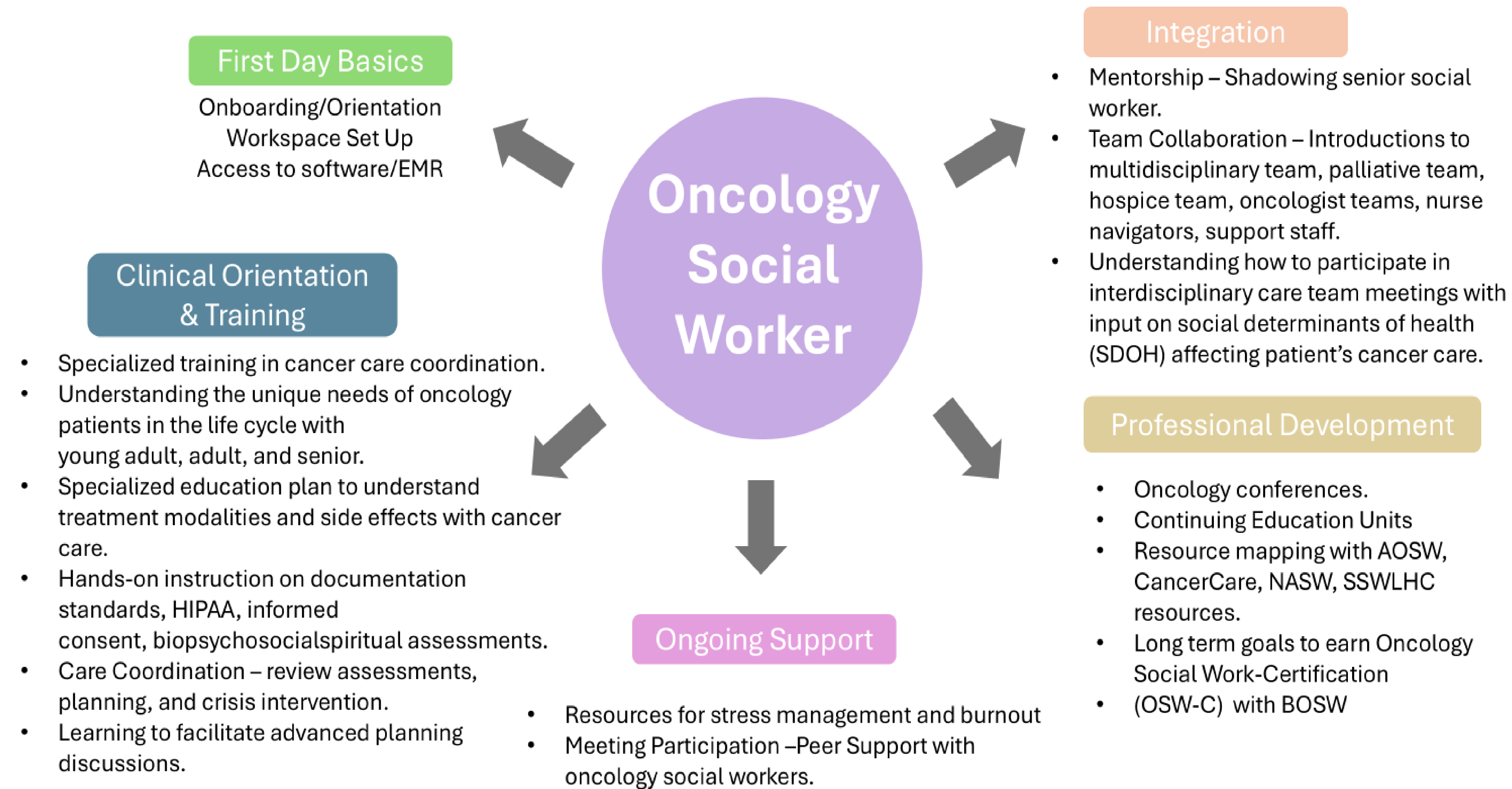
1. Apply professional ethics and standards of social work practice.
2. Understand the stages of the cancer journey: diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and end-of-life care.
3. Identify key components of psychosocial assessment, planning and intervention.
4. Implement best practices in psychosocial support and counseling.
5. Understand and navigate the healthcare systems with interdisciplinary teams.
6. Access and coordinate resources, including financial assistance, support groups and community programs.
7. Develop strategies to prevent burnout and build professional resilience for new oncology social workers. Provide a peer group to serve as a vital support system for new social workers.

METHODS

The program emphasizes foundational skill development for new oncology social workers, with a focus on serving underserved and diverse populations. Training integrates practical and theoretical knowledge through structured orientation, clinical supervision, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Core components include leadership development, competency-based training, and continuous learning opportunities that bridge education and practice. Through targeted skill-building, participants develop the applied “know how” necessary to support patients and families throughout the cancer journey.

Orientation Program for New Oncology Social Worker



Empowering New Oncology Social Workers!



CONCLUSION

The implementation of our orientation program has encouraged both new and experienced social workers to evaluate and adapt practices that ensure our commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. Program outcomes demonstrate increased knowledge, clinical skills and professional confidence among participants. Case file reviews and direct observation indicate reduced case backlog, improved outcomes in concrete services and enhanced quality of support for our patients. In sum, our orientation program ensures quality and empathetic care, which defines the social work profession.

LIMITATIONS

- Gaps in social work education.
- Field instructors have difficulties reinforcing academic content.
- Field placements emphasize direct practice positions.
- Social work students have limited understanding of macro-level issues.

IMPLICATIONS/FUTURE WORK

- New social workers to engage in research training.
- Financial support for students with site funded field education.
- Training programs that address macro-level practice.
- Social workers to accept more practicum students.