

Describing the Role of the Nurse in Radiation in Oncology

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The Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery in collaboration with St. Luke's Hospital has recently completed a mixed methods research study to describe the role of the nurse in radiation oncology. Internationally, variability exists in the educational requirements, tasks, functions, skills and working environments of nurses working in radiation oncology and this has contributed to a lack of clarity and definition on this role. In Ireland, the reconfiguration of cancer care services, developments in nurse-led care and nurse prescribing and the strategic framework for role expansion of nurses and midwives underscores the need to describe this role.

This study was completed from January to March 2011 and included 120 nursing staff. The study design incorporated focus groups (N=2) and questionnaire.

The study identified the huge impact nurses in radiation oncology had on patient education, discharge planning and post-discharge support. Nurses in this specialist area of practice are highly educated with many holding dual qualifications including PG Dip and MSc in cancer care. There is potential for the development of nurse-led services in this area particularly around post-treatment follow up for monitoring and management of early and late onset side effects.

The study will be presented at the RCSI International Nursing and Midwifery Research Conference in February 2012 and has been submitted to the European Oncology Nurses Society. For more information please contact scowman@rcsi.ie or ggethin@rcsi.ie