Moral distress is defined as knowing the right thing to do when policy constraints do not allow for appropriate choices. The purpose of the current study was to explore the existence of moral distress in oncology nurses with a cross-sectional survey completed by nurses working on inpatient units at a midwestern cancer hospital. Investigators distributed the Moral Distress Scale–Revised to all direct care staff nurses. The main research variables were moral distress, level of education, age, and type of unit. Most of the 73 nurses had low to moderate scores, and two had high scores. No significant correlations were observed among age or years of experience. Type of unit and level of moral distress were correlated, and an inverse relationship between level of education and moral distress was found. Moral distress exists in nurses who work on oncology units irrespective of experience in oncology or the specific unit. Nurses must be aware of the existence of moral distress and find ways to reduce potential emotional problems.

Janet Sirilla, DNP, RN, OCN®, NE-BC, is the service line administrator for Blood and Marrow Transplantation and Hematology in the Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center at the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute in Columbus. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the article. The author did not receive honoraria for this work. The content of this article has been reviewed by independent peer reviewers to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the author, planners, independent peer reviewers, or editorial staff. Sirilla can be reached at jan.sirilla@osumc.edu, with copy to editor at CJONEditor@ons.org. (Submitted December 2013. Revision submitted January 2014. Accepted for publication January 19, 2014.)

Key words: coping; moral distress; ethics; burnout; psychosocial issues

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/14.CJON.536-541