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Interprofessional Psychosocial Oncology: Introduction to Theory and Practice

COURSE SYLLABUS

2025

Course Facilitator: Marianne Arab

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**Course Offering:** de Souza Institute in collaboration with the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology

**Course Format:** Real-time online seminar & eLearning

**Contact Information:** [Victoria.wolno@desouzainstitute.com](mailto:Victoria.wolno@desouzainstitute.com)

**Registration:** Required

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## A. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This continuing education course is an introduction to the field of psychosocial oncology. It is designed primarily for health care professionals in 5 disciplines (medicine, nursing, psychology, social work and spiritual care) though practitioners in other disciplines may also benefit. Psychosocial oncology is concerned with the myriad of psychological, social and spiritual responses of individuals and families living with cancer.

This introductory course provides participants with exposure to theories and models commonly used in psychosocial oncology, including developmental, existential, family systems, and social constructivist theories as well as evidence-based assessment and interventions to assist individuals and their families to manage the illness across the trajectory of cancer (diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, terminal illness, death and bereavement).

Case based learning in small interprofessional groups will allow participants to explore a variety of key learning themes relevant to psychosocial oncology including psychosocial assessment and distress, depression, anxiety, adjustment and coping, sexuality, loss and grief, survivorship and rehabilitation.

## B. COURSE OBJECTIVES

### Psychosocial Oncology Objectives

- Explore the illness experience of cancer as both a chronic and life threatening illness from a person-centered perspective.
- Analyze theoretical and empirical issues in psychosocial oncology.
- Explore personal thoughts and feelings in the area of living and dying with cancer, and the ways in which these can become avenues of personal and professional growth.
- Develop knowledge and skills to assess individuals and families from a psychosocial and spiritual perspective and to develop a collaborative patient/family centered plan of care that is responsive to patient/family needs.
- Critique evidenced-based interventions that foster healing and facilitate coping in the face of psychosocial and spiritual distress. Approaches include psycho-educational, cognitive-behavioral, family systems, mind-body, existential, spiritual and the arts. Social determinants of health are understood to be important determinants of healing and coping and also will be explored.
- Acknowledge and attend to aspects of diversity and understand how these might influence the experience of cancer and the health care system.

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## Interprofessional Collaboration Objectives

- Analyze the unique contributions of each discipline in psychosocial oncology (interprofessional), as well as areas of commonality (transprofessional) across disciplines.
- Develop theoretical understandings of collaboration and interprofessional team work, including forming and maintaining interprofessional relationships and teams and conflict management strategies.
- Understand the roles, regulatory frameworks, responsibilities and professional capabilities of members of other professions.
- Develop self-awareness, cultural competency and relational practices for effective interprofessional team work, as well as awareness of personal strengths and areas of growth.
- Analyze practice environments and their influence on team collaboration and provision of care. “Practice environment” is understood to include community.

## C. MODE OF LEARNING

The main mechanisms to facilitate learning in this course will entail eLearning and thirteen 1.0 hour weekly real time online conference sessions.

### *eLearning*

The course homepage will be located at the de Souza eLearning center. The eLearning will cover the following activities:

- Self-directed learning: There are 6 units in the course, with each unit being completed over a 2-week period. Please follow the content sequence outlined by the course table on page 5. Online resources include background information, content modules, interviews, narratives, plays, and case studies with questions for reflections.
- Discussion boards via the eLearning platform is intended to engage all participants enrolled in the course. This is a form of learning that really depends on the active participation of the group. Online discussions regarding module content, readings or activities will enhance knowledge acquisition. It is encouraged that you share experiences, ideas or resources from clinical practice with others in the course
- Technical support will be provided throughout the course.

### ***Seminar – real time online conferencing***

Every week, participants will meet with a faculty facilitator online for 1 hour. The format is seminar style in real time, with all members of the group contributing to the discussion of assigned readings or other resources. Seminars will provide opportunities to develop and practice interprofessional collaboration skills and to learn from, with, and about other disciplines and roles in psychosocial oncology. Links to the online conference will be provided in the course homepage on eLearning centre. Live sessions are mandatory for this course. We realize that being available for all the live classroom sessions may be difficult due to unforeseen circumstances, so we allow up to 3 missed sessions. The live sessions are recorded for you to review at any time after the session.

## **D. MODES OF EVALUATION**

The following are required in order to receive a course completion certificate. Feedback will be provided by the faculty facilitators: a *Pass* or a *Fail* grade will be assigned.

### **1. Brief reflection papers**

Write 3 reflection papers, no more than 500 words (2 pages) about some course topic that you find provocative or interesting. These are due at the end of weeks 4, 7 and 11. Specific guidelines for the reflection papers are provided on the course home page under the *Evaluation* folder.

### **2. Participation in online conference and discussion boards**

You will be required to attend and actively participate in **10 out of 13** online conferences (in real time). In addition, you are expected to contribute regularly and meaningfully to online discussion boards (you can post to discussion boards 24/7). Effective use of the discussion boards includes posting reflection questions, thoughtful replies to postings and building on the reflections shared by others through referring to readings or experiences. Participants are also expected to contribute to creating a safe learning environment for themselves and their colleagues. Part of creating the community of learning is to ensure that you complete a profile posting on the discussion board including a digital photo. You will be asked to self-evaluate your participation as part of the course completion requirements.

## **E. TIME REQUIREMENT AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS**

To be successful in completing this course, you are encouraged to set aside approximately 4 to 6 hours each week to complete each section as learning is primarily self-directed. The total learning hours for this course are **48 hours**. It is strongly recommended for participants not to plan a vacation during the course offering period. If you plan to go on vacation, you must notify the course facilitator at least two weeks in advance. It is expected that you post your discussion posting/ submit your assignment before you go on vacation.

## F. FACILITATOR AVAILABILITY

Facilitator for this course will be responsible to guide the eLearning component including online discussion, to lead online conference session, to be available to you for questions throughout the course and to provide final grade. The response time from a participant enquiry to a facilitator response ranges from 24 hour to 48 hours. Technical support is available by contacting [support@desouzainstitute.com](mailto:support@desouzainstitute.com)

You can reach the facilitators at: [Marianne.Arab@nshealth.ca](mailto:Marianne.Arab@nshealth.ca)

## G. COURSE TIMELINE

*The following units are to be completed in sequential order.*

<b>Unit 1: The Experience of Cancer</b>	
<b>Week 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation to the Course and course site</li> <li>• Introduction to screening for cancer-related distress</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person/family experiences of cancer</li> <li>• Screening for distress</li> <li>• Interprofessional Collaboration: What does it mean?</li> </ul>
<b>week 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person/family experiences of cancer</li> <li>• Psychosocial Distress &amp; Assessment</li> <li>• Initial responses to distress</li> </ul>
<b>Unit 2: Interprofessional Assessment of Psychosocial Distress</b>	
<b>Week 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychosocial Distress &amp; Assessment (<i>cont'd</i>)</li> <li>• Depression &amp; Suicide</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety, fear and uncertainty</li> <li>• Cancer Related Fatigue</li> </ul>
<b>Unit 3: Attending to Issues of Diversity in Psychosocial Oncology</b>	
<b>Week 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity &amp; Cultural Safety Part I</li> <li>• Interprofessional Collaboration: Being in Difference</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity &amp; Cultural Safety Part II</li> <li>• Exploring experiences of minority groups</li> <li>• Interprofessional Collaboration Across Difference</li> </ul>
<b>Unit 4 Family and Children Across the Illness Trajectory</b>	
<b>Week 8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family experience of cancer across the illness trajectory from a family developmental framework</li> <li>• The experience of children/adolescents &amp; young adults when a parent has cancer</li> </ul>
<b>Week 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The financial impact of cancer on families</li> <li>• Return to work</li> </ul>

<b>Unit 5: Special Topics</b>	
<b>Week 10</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexuality &amp; Cancer</li> </ul>
<b>Week 11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision Making &amp; Cancer</li> </ul>
<b>Unit 6: Cancer, Loss &amp; the Search for Meaning</b>	
<b>Week 12</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hope &amp; meaning making from a psychological, existential and spiritual perspective</li> </ul>
<b>Week 13</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grief and loss associated with the cancer experience</li> <li>• Interprofessional collaboration – evaluating learning and collaboration</li> <li>• Course Wrap up and evaluation</li> </ul>

### **Statutory Holidays**

When your scheduled seminar falls on a statutory holiday, groups will need to negotiate with their group facilitator about how to make up the seminar time in order that all the topics are covered, i.e., to have a longer seminar the week following or preceding the holiday.

## **H. HISTORY OF THIS COURSE**

This course was conceived by members of the Education Committee of the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology (CAPO) through a Health Canada Interprofessional Education for Collaborative Patient Centered Practice (IECPCP) grant. The course is maintained through course fees and in-kind contributions. The initial Interprofessional Psychosocial Oncology Education (IPODE) project and course development occurred through the contributions of a pan-Canadian group of faculty, clinicians, researchers and administrators representing universities, cancer agencies and CAPO. Experts in psychosocial oncology, distance education and interprofessional education contributed to the IPODE Project through regional expert panels.

## **I. FACILITATOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

Marianne currently works at Cancer Care Nova Scotia, the provincial cancer agency in Halifax, Nova Scotia as the Manager of Supportive Care and Psychosocial Oncology. Her career experience includes working as an inpatient clinical social work in the areas of Family Medicine, Oncology and Palliative Care. She established the Grief and Bereavement Program for the Capital Health Palliative Care Program, and was the Bereavement Coordinator for the Program for four years. She was also involved in the development and training of bereavement volunteers throughout the province.

Marianne has been a strong advocate and champion for persons with cancer and hospice palliative care in her province, serving on the Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association Board for many years and co-chairing numerous initiatives to improve oncology and palliative care services. She is co-lead of a federally funded initiative training

paramedics to provide palliative care at home for patients in crises requiring palliative support who do not wish to be transported to their local emergency department. As well she has been instrumental in the adoption of screening for and management of distress in oncology clinics across Nova Scotia. She has been an on-line facilitator for the IPODE continuing education course since 2009 and was a field placement supervisor and seminar facilitator for MSW and BSW on campus and distance education social work students at the School of Social Work, Dalhousie University.

Marianne has played a key role in the development of the Palliative Care Strategy in Nova Scotia and continues to act as a consultant to various working groups involved in moving the Strategy forward and improving access and quality of palliative care for all Nova Scotians.

Marianne has her Bachelor of Social Work from McGill University and her Masters in Social Work from Dalhousie University.

## **J. GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE DISCUSSION**

Discussion related to course content will take place in the collaboration discussion forums. The collaboration discussion forums provide you with the opportunity to share ideas and clarify your understanding of course content and readings.

## **K. SOCIAL FORUM**

The social forum is provided for you, the participants, to post news, items of general interest, share information about yourselves and to raise topics of interest beyond the specific questions being discussed in the module-specific forums. All messages of a social nature can be posted in the social forum. This forum is open to all participants, including the facilitator.

## **L. VIRTUAL LIBRARY**

The de Souza Institute has a virtual library <http://library.desouzainstitute.com/login> that can be accessed to those registered in this course or any other de Souza Institute continuing education program. This invaluable resource enables you to access over 1500 e-Journals, 200 e-books and 8 on-line databases such as CINHALL or Ovid-Medline. You can use the virtual library to access the required reading materials for your course. The virtual library can be accessed 24 hours a day using your de Souza Institute login and password.

## M. TECHNICAL SUPPORT

### **eLearning Centre Orientation**

If this is the first time you are taking a course offered by the de Souza Institute, please complete the eLearning Centre Orientation. This is designed to introduce you to online learning and help you understand how to navigate through the de Souza Institute eLearning center and courses. The goal of eLearning orientation is to answer all of your questions in order to facilitate a dynamic and meaningful learning experience.

### **de Souza Support**

If you have questions about the content of a course, please email your course facilitator.

If you need assistance accessing or navigating the eLearning Center, please refer to the eLearning Orientation course. If you have questions or have any general, technical difficulties please contact [support@desouzainstitute.com](mailto:support@desouzainstitute.com)

## N. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

[Academic Honesty and Copyright Policy](#)

[Cancellations, Incomplete and No Show Policy](#)

[Request for Accommodation Policy](#)

Course content and resources provided in this course are based on best practice guidelines from provincial and national bodies. Please consult your educator if you have specific questions related to local protocols and policies as they vary among healthcare organizations.