

"More Than a Member: How UKONS Became My Professional Home"

Internationally educated nurses face various challenges when adapting to a new environment. Differences in healthcare systems require adjustments in clinical practices, technology use, and protocols. Social integration is not always easy, as building professional and personal relationships takes time. Navigating these obstacles requires strong support systems, inclusive workplace policies, and mentorship programs to help nurses transition successfully. In this article, we share some of stories from internationally educated nurses working in cancer care and their experience of being UKONS members.

Laura Collantes-Espinosa joined UKONS shortly after arriving in the UK from Spain, in 2011. She is an **Advanced Nurse Practitioner at The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust**. Laura became a member of the Research MIG more recently, when she embarked in a research career as a pre-doctoral fellow. Laura believes that being part of UKONS has shaped her practice and career in many ways by providing knowledge and enabling networking. She thinks, "UKONS is a great organisation that supports nurses and encourages very much needed changes in practice. It also motivates people interested in research to continue learning and developing their skills."



"More than a member...UKONS is my professional home" -- this is how **Hanan Hamsar**, a **Radiotherapy Clinical Nurse Specialist** in London describes his experience of being a UKONS member. He explains, "As an internationally educated nurse, my journey into cancer nursing in the UK was both humbling and empowering. I arrived from Pakistan with a good foundation in nursing but quickly realised that adapting to a new healthcare system, culture, and expectations would be a steep learning curve. In those early days, I often felt like I was navigating unfamiliar waters. When I discovered UKONS it became a source of guidance, reassurance, and connection. I still remember attending my first UKONS conference. I was nervous, unsure if I would fit in or not. But from the moment I walked in, I felt welcomed. I met other nurses who had walked similar paths, and I listened to speakers who reflected the diversity and strength of our profession. That experience gave me confidence. I joined webinars, read guidelines, and participated in discussions that broadened my understanding of oncology nursing in the UK context. More importantly, I felt part of a community that values inclusion and celebrates the unique contributions of every nurse."



As a Hungarian nurse working in the UK, UKONS has been a vital part of the cancer nursing journey of **Edit Galambos, Lead Cancer Nurse at Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust**. She shared, “When I first started, navigating a new healthcare system and culture could feel isolating at times. Being part of UKONS helped me feel connected to a wider community of cancer nurses who share a passion for improving patient care. It provided access to valuable resources, educational opportunities, and a supportive network that boosted my confidence and professional development. UKONS has also helped me understand the unique challenges and strengths that nurses from diverse backgrounds bring to cancer care. Through the organisation’s commitment to inclusivity and professional growth, I’ve been able to embrace my identity and experiences while contributing meaningfully to the nursing community. It’s been empowering to see how UKONS champions diversity and encourages nurses like me to lead, innovate, and share our voices.”



From the Philippines is **Gian Carlo Alcantara**, a **Practice Development Nurse** at **King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust**. “I’ve been working in cancer services in the UK since 2018; and became a UKONS member in December 2023 and joined the Haemato-Oncology MIG. Although I’m still quite new as a member, I’ve always seen UKONS as a valuable presence in our field. It helped raise the standard of care for our patients by offering guidance, resources, and a platform that supports both personal and professional development for nurses especially through training and education. Coming from an international background, UKONS has contributed to my journey, not just by enhancing my knowledge, but also by supporting my growth into a leadership role. From a junior staff member in haematology and bone marrow transplant unit to becoming a clinical educator, I have the privilege to train and empower the next generation of nurses by equipping them with knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities of cancer care with compassion and clinical excellence. Happy 20th anniversary, UKONS! Thank you for continuing to champion excellence, inclusivity, and empower nurses like me to make a difference in cancer care. Here’s to many more years of success!”



Also from the Philippines is **Nova Alzate**, a **Lead Surgical Care Practitioner in Robotic Surgery** based in Wales. She says, “Being part of UKONS, improves my channel of communication with other cancer nurses across the UK whom I could ask for advice, share my experiences and learn from them. UKONS foster well-being and uplifts my professional development. I am grateful for UKONS’ continuous support to all of us. Indeed, it is a pleasure to be part of UKONS. Happy 20th Anniversary and more power to you all who keep its vision and values burning!”



Similar to others' views, **Chenika Goldson** who is working in **Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust** recognised how UKONS played a vital role in supporting her transition from a general registered nurse to a specialist oncology nurse. Chen has been a UKONS member since 2019 and a UKONS Champion since 2023. She says, "As a British nurse with family from the global majority, I found UKONS to be an inclusive and supportive platform that offered a wealth of resources to guide my development. From evidence-based tools to training opportunities and professional networks, UKONS has consistently provided the support needed to grow my confidence and competence in oncology nursing. This ongoing guidance has helped shape my practice and empowered me to deliver high-quality, patient-centred cancer care." Her message for UKONS on this milestone, "Congratulations to UKONS on your 20th anniversary! Thank you for being a constant source of support, guidance, and inspiration throughout my oncology nursing journey."

