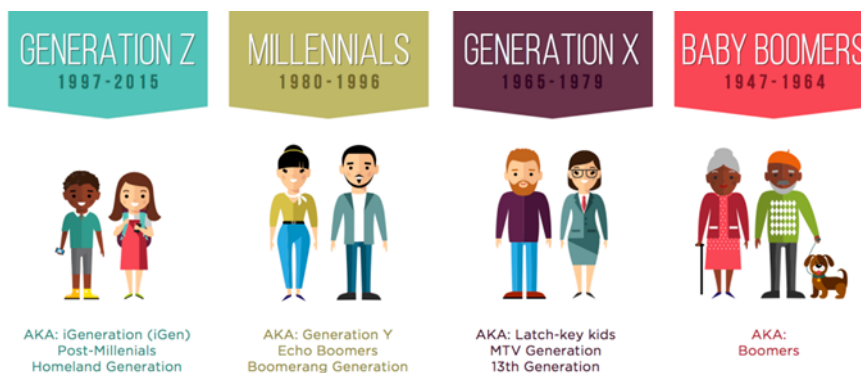


## Mentoring young cancer nurses

I first came into contact with the European Oncology Nursing Society (EONS) during the ESO/EONS Masterclass in Oncology Nursing in 2016. This experience felt like a metaphorical springboard for my career, despite being a cancer nurse for several years already. Following the masterclass, I was lucky enough to be involved in several opportunities. One of these was when I was asked to do a presentation on my experiences as a young cancer nurse, even though I wasn't a young cancer nurse anymore! A second opportunity was when I did a presentation about nurses of different generations working on oncology wards at the same time.

### Different cultures

I have to admit, I did have my own opinions about the younger generation of nurses, and it wasn't always 100% positive. Let me explain... Being a Xennial (generation X) myself, I have grown up in an analogue childhood but a digital adulthood; I have experienced work and life both with and without technology. Some of the challenges I have perceived when working with, and educating nurses from generation Z are that they have been more prone to lean on technology rather than the more traditional approaches. I feel that some generalisations made extend past the technology; 'they are too young and immature for the workplace, particularly with regard to a nursing career in oncology', 'they can't communicate face-to-face and spend too much time on their mobiles'. The same could be suggested about people from generation Y who have never NOT known a time without the internet and are 'permanently attached to their iPhones'. I have encountered both these behaviours and attitudes in my own daily practice and really wasn't sure how to encourage the different cultures of the generations to come together.



### I stand corrected

But, I often find that attitudes and misconceptions about others are due to a lack of understanding and particularly in relation to my own personal view of younger nurses; I have to stand corrected. In my role as an EONS Executive Board Member, I am involved with the young cancer nurses network (YCN) and am working with the younger generation more than ever. I have learned that they are a group of professionals who are passionate, enthusiastic, empathetic, hardworking and committed. They also have very creative minds and look for solutions where I myself would not, they bring skills to the table the more experienced nurses can only dream of. I admire their ability to be willing and able to talk about difficult topics such as bullying, burnout and compassion fatigue, and they have created ways to improve resilience. A culture which is certainly positive and new for more experienced generations of nurses.

### Cherishing and mentoring our young cancer nurses

In this current European climate, with shortages in healthcare, an aging population and even a

pandemic on top of that, we need to cherish and mentor our young cancer nurses in order to keep them safe and valued in our nursing profession. American research has shown that 37% of young cancer nurses leave their profession within the first year or are thinking about it due to high work pressure, work-related stress and poor rosters which may lead to compassion fatigue and burnout. These are shocking numbers. Nurses are at the core of health care. They are with patients for the longest amount of time, providing not only very personal care in the physical sense, but also often the emotional support too. We really get to know our patients at an individual level, which is necessary to provide for our patients in the only way we know how. But it also increases the risks of compassion fatigue and burn out.

### **The leaders of the future**

How can young cancer nurses grow into the types of cancer nurse leaders that we need? The answer is not altogether that hard. We have to look at the similarities instead of focusing on the differences between generations. Fundamentally, we all want to provide the highest quality of care for our patients and their loved ones. In every generation there is a leader for the next and role modelling can work both down and up the generations. We have a shared responsibility to work together, to learn from each other and to ensure that all cancer patients can benefit from the care of a highly educated and competent workforce, whatever generation.

It was in the 2016 Masterclass that I met one of my role models, now my mentor in my new role as an EONS Executive Board Member. I would like to end with a message to all cancer nurses, but to young cancer nurses specifically: Please find someone professionally who can mentor you and you can feel safe confiding in, but also don't forget that you have skills to teach the experienced generation of nurses too. Seek those colleagues who can be your biggest support; who can fan your flames.

