Introduction

The older adult population in the United States will significantly increase over the next four decades. In older adults, cancer treatment is made more complex by diminished functional status, comorbidities, and altered physical, physiological and psychosocial capacity. Identifying and understanding the interplay of these health issues equips the ambulatory oncology nurse to anticipate needs, intervene promptly and effectively manage competing demands for care. While significant work has been accomplished for managing older adults in inpatient settings, care management strategies for older adults with cancer in the ambulatory care setting are less established. Often subtle alterations in health or functional status can signal the onset of toxicities or complications that can result in serious consequences. This handbook has been developed by advanced nursing clinicians to provide the oncology nurse a systematic framework for addressing the needs of older adults with cancer in an ambulatory care setting.

Cancer care delivered in an ambulatory setting is complex. When the patient is an older adult the complexity increases. For the older adult, intricate physical and functional assessment, the involvement of multiple disciplines, and coordination of care resources are required. Therapeutic interactions among family members and caregivers, access to community and supportive resources, assessment of learning needs and abilities, provision and reinforcement of patient education are all essential considerations when cancer treatment and care is being determined. All efforts are directed at providing the older adult optimal treatment options while preventing, controlling, promptly recognizing and intervening as
problems arise. The collaborative efforts of the care team are to minimize complications that would negatively impact the treatment effectiveness while maintaining the patient’s functional status and independence consistent with their pre-treatment lifestyle.

The ability to access information related to the most common and significant symptoms associated with the treatment of cancer in older adults will enable the ambulatory nurse to intervene to minimize severity, reduce distress, improve quality of life and maintain care in the ambulatory setting. This pocket guide, *Geriatric Plan: the MSKCC Ambulatory Nurses Guide to Assist Older Adults Though Cancer Treatment* is the first such tool of its kind. Based on the pneumonic GERIATRIC PLAN, each letter is associated with an area for focused clinical assessment of the older adult. Additionally, an algorithm to facilitate the recognition of factors placing the patient at risk for decline was developed to use in concert with the GERIATRIC PLAN. These instruments can readily be incorporated into existing nursing assessments and care management processes. *The Geriatric Plan: the MSKCC Ambulatory Nurses Guide to Assist Older Adults Though Cancer Treatment* has universal applicability across cancer types and treatment modalities. This systematic approach can be used to guide the nurse in the care coordination of this special patient population.