Psychosocial Provider Perspectives on Communication

Elizabeth J. Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH
Executive Director
National Association of Social Workers
Cancer is a Crisis for the Patient and the Family

Experts in psychosocial behavior generally agree that the capacity to be self-reliant, to advocate for oneself and to move forward is temporarily diminished by a diagnosis of cancer.
Psychosocial Aspects of Cancer

- Normlessness of the cancer experience
- Problems with reentry
- Employment discrimination
- Living with uncertainty
- Adherence to difficult medical regimens
- Living with loss
- Financial stress
- Changing family roles
- Maintaining a positive future orientation
Communication and advocacy are crucial in cancer care.
Barriers to Communication

• Individual barriers
• Family barriers
• Health care provider barriers
• Community barriers
• Policy barriers
Psychosocial health services are psychological and social services and interventions that enable patients, their families, and health care providers to optimize biomedical health care and to manage the psychosocial/behavioral and social aspects of illness and its consequences so as to promote better health.

-*IOM Report: Cancer Care for the Whole Patient (2007)*
Challenges to Provision of Psychosocial Services

- Workforce shortages
- Access to services
- Fragmentation
- Sporadic delivery
- Underfunding
- Lack of reimbursement
- Insurance confusion
- Increasingly complex needs of patients

Need to recruit, retain, and retrain workforce
Patient Self-Advocacy…

• gives stability and a feeling of regaining some control over one’s life
• is confidence building in facing challenges that may seem insurmountable
• is a way of reaching out to others
• can improve quality of life
• may be the difference that turns feeling hopeless and helpless into feeling hopeful
Best Practices: Self-Advocacy Tools

Cancer Support Community

Formerly The Wellness Community Silicon Valley

Cancer Survival Toolbox

Building skills that work for you
Health Professional Advocacy

“...it is easy to become immersed in direct service without considering that there is a role for individual workers and their professional organizations in the political sphere. We are obligated to use our professional expertise and clinical experience to systematically influence decision-making for the greater good of our clients.”

(Stearns, 2001)
Best Practices: Patient Navigation

Professional Navigation

Peer Navigation

www.cancerpatientnavigation.org
Recommendations

The provision of psychosocial services must be safeguarded and promoted.


Substantial actions are needed by public and private entities

– *Cancer Care for the Whole Patient* (2007).
Recommendations

Build communication channels that link all stakeholders in patient centered care into a participatory community and this will lead to quality cancer care.
Best Practices: Communication

The National Transitions of Care Coalition
www.ntocc.org

Rush University Medical Center
Enhanced Discharge Planning Program
www.rush.edu/rumc
Recommendations

Foster a community of hope:

- Includes trust, openness, and teamwork
- Provides support and continuity of care
- Offers a holistic, strengths-based approach
- Accepts all visions of hope