

Title: Coordination of Cancer Care and the Importance of Communication

Canadian Team to Improve Community-based Cancer Care along the Continuum (CanIMPACT)

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For CanIMPACT

Background: Many health care providers from multiple settings are often involved in the care of cancer patients, from diagnosis to survivorship. With so many involved, the care of these patients can often become fragmented and uncoordinated, potentially jeopardizing patient safety and the quality of the care. Efficient coordination and smooth transitions of patient care between primary healthcare and specialist providers are vital to improve the quality and outcomes of cancer care.

Research Objective: To explore stakeholder perspectives and contextual factors related to the coordination of care between family physicians, specialist care providers and the cancer patients.

Methods: Using a Constructive Grounded Theory approach, we are conducting telephone interviews with breast and colorectal cancer survivors who are 1-4 years post-diagnosis and primary and specialist health care providers (HCPs) from across Canada.

Preliminary Results: To date, we have completed 26 interviews with cancer survivors and 9 interviews with HCPs. Communication has emerged as an important theme relating to the coordination of cancer care for both cancer survivors and HCPs, particularly during transitions of care such as after-hours care, transfer of care from specialist to primary healthcare. From the patient perspective, the importance of trusting relationships with the HCPs and the delivery of timely health information using appropriate technology was stressed. Several patients responded to communication and diagnostic delays by assuming greater personal responsibility for coordination of care. For HCPs, issues include 1) outdated or incompatible communication technology; 2) delays in medical transcription; and 3) idiosyncratic health systems/policies.

Conclusion: Effective and timely communication is essential to good coordination of care along the cancer care trajectory particularly during transitions of care for both HCPs and cancer patients. Despite advances in technology, substantial challenges around communication still exist, which in turn can lead to serious consequences that impact clinical decision making about patient care.

299/300words