Americans who live in poverty as well as certain ethnic and racial groups have higher cancer death rates than other populations. Patient navigators have been identified as an important weapon against these disparities. Navigators can address insurance, financial, and logistical issues (e.g., transportation, appointment scheduling, child or elder care). They can provide understandable health education that may lessen fears of cancer diagnosis and treatment. This article describes the development and implementation of a multisite patient navigator program involving five cancer institutions in Western Pennsylvania. Navigator programs have great potential to enhance cancer care by reaching underserved populations and opening the door for future research.

At a Glance

- Patient navigation is a new concept in which trained personnel assist patients with cancer with access to care and impact outcomes.
- Barriers to care are comparable for rural and urban facilities, but the time to resolve barriers differs according to the community resources available.
- Patients and physicians report satisfaction with the use of patient navigators. However, the impact of patient navigation on clinical outcomes and its cost-effectiveness warrants further investigation.

African Americans comprised 13% of the U.S. population and 24% live below the poverty level (American Cancer Society, 2007). Thirty-three percent of working-age African Americans were uninsured in 2005 compared to 20% of Caucasians.