Using Care Plans to Enhance Care Throughout the Cancer Survivorship Trajectory

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The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) recognizes the importance of cancer survivorship and has launched several initiatives focused on cancer care since 2008. Cancer survivors are those who have been diagnosed with cancer, from the time of diagnosis until death. Recognizing the pivotal role that oncology nurses play in helping patients and their families navigate all phases of the cancer continuum, ONS has partnered with Journey Forward in the development of a survivorship care plan builder.

Journey Forward

Several survivorship care plans are available. Journey Forward is one solution to providing comprehensive care for cancer survivors. ONS joined the Journey Forward initiative in early 2011. Journey Forward is a survivorship care plan builder that provides a free, downloadable tool that can be used by members of the oncology team to build a care plan for patients. The information that comes in the Journey Forward Toolkit (CD-ROM) includes information on care plans, billing, and resources for physicians and patients, as well as patient resources that aim to empower patients to request a survivorship care plan.

The Journey Forward program is one example of a software program that can be used to create survivorship care plans. Templates are available for planning survivorship care for three cancers, breast, colon, and lymphoma, as well as a generic template that can be tailored to the specific needs of the survivor; more are under development. The template begins with basic patient demographic and contact information of the various healthcare providers participating in the patient’s care. The second page of the template includes detailed information about the tumor pathology and staging. The “Treatment” page provides space for detailed information about treatment regimens, dates, dosages, and patient participation in to improving patient care outcomes. Teaching health maintenance, as well as monitoring for long-term complications of malignancy and its treatment, are necessary to meet the basic health needs of survivors and provide the necessary screening and follow-up after treatment (Cooper, Loeb, & Smith, 2010).

The Institute of Medicine report From Cancer Patient to Cancer Survivor: Lost in Transition includes several key recommendations for cancer survivorship care, including (a) building bridges between oncology and primary care providers, (b) developing guidelines to improve quality, (c) providing professional education and training, and (d) creating a survivorship care plan based on the American Society of Clinical Oncology’s surveillance guidelines for long-term and later-term effects of cancer treatment (Hewitt, Greenfield, & Stovall, 2006; Hollowell et al., 2010).

Several organizations, including ONS, recognize that as the number of cancer survivors continues to increase, significant unmet needs still exist for providers and survivors.

Importance of Survivorship Care

Educating patients and families across the trajectory of cancer care is crucial for improving patient care outcomes. Teaching health maintenance, as well as monitoring for long-term complications of malignancy and its treatment, are necessary to meet the basic health needs of survivors and provide the necessary screening and follow-up after treatment (Cooper, Loeb, & Smith, 2010).

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For More Information

To learn more about the Journey Forward initiative and access the care plan builder described in this article, visit http://journeyforward.org.