Cancer Care Patients and Families Prioritize High-Quality Relationships and Communication

Study in the October issue of The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety

(OAKBROOK TERRACE, Illinois, September 21, 2017) – A new study in the October issue of *The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety* suggests that cancer care patients and their family members prioritize high-quality relationships and communication over quality and safety concerns. Study authors suggest this may be because cancer care is primarily delivered in outpatient settings, which typically require long-term relationships with providers and frequent visits, given the complexity of care.

Limited data exists about complaints related to cancer care, with reports generally focusing on inpatient care. The study, “Evaluation of Patient and Family Outpatient Complaints as a Strategy to Prioritize Efforts to Improve Cancer Care Delivery,” by Jennifer W. Mack, MD, MPH, associate professor, Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School, Boston, and associate program director, Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Fellowship, Pediatric Oncology, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, and co-authors, focuses on outpatient complaints made to the Patient/Family Relations Office at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in a two-year period.

After reviewing the complaints, the study authors found that while 48 percent of complaints involved management issues, the next largest number of complaints—41 percent—related to relationships, including communication breakdowns (15 percent), patient-staff dialogue (5 percent), and humanness and caring (18 percent). Only 11 percent related to quality and safety concerns. However, these complaints were frequently of higher severity than others—emphasizing the need for high-quality relationships and communication, as well as for high-quality and safety.
In an accompanying editorial, “Patient and Family Complaints in Cancer Care: What Can We Learn From the Tip of the Iceberg?,” Kimberly A. Fisher, MD, MSc, and Kathleen M. Mazor, EdD, Meyers Primary Care Institute, Worcester, Massachusetts, state that “The ultimate goal of systematically categorizing patient complaints is to understand how patients experience health care—particularly the problems—and to use what is learned to make health care more patient centered.”

Open access is available to the full cancer care study and editorial. Also featured in the October 2017 issue:

- “Missed Diagnosis of Cardiovascular Disease in Outpatient General Medicine: Insights from Malpractice Claims Data”
- “Clinician Perspectives on the Management of Abnormal Subcritical Tests in an Urban Academic Safety-Net Health Care System”
- “Psychometric Evaluation of the Hospital Culture of Transitions Survey”
- “Toward More Proactive Approaches to Safety in the Electronic Health Record Era”
- “Quality of Septic Shock Care in the Emergency Department: Perceptions vs. Reality”

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Note for editors
The article is “Evaluation of Patient and Family Outpatient Complaints as a Strategy to Prioritize Efforts to Improve Cancer Care Delivery,” by Jennifer W. Mack, MD, MPH; Joseph Jacobson, MD, MSc; David Frank, MD, PhD; Angel M. Cronin, MSc; Kathleen Horvath, BA; Victoria Allen, BA; Jennifer Wind, MA; and Deborah Schrag, MD, MPH. The editorial is “Patient and Family Complaints in Cancer Care: What Can We Learn From the Tip of the Iceberg?” by Kimberly A. Fisher, MD, MSc; and Kathleen M. Mazor, EdD. The article and editorial appear in The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety, volume 43, number 10 (October 2017), published by Elsevier.