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Review Article

Supportive oncology: a blueprint for patient-centric care

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ABSTRACT

The article emphasizes a paradigm shift toward patient-centric care while providing a thorough examination of the changing supportive oncology landscape. When a patient is diagnosed with cancer, they must not only deal with the medical effects of the illness but also manage difficult emotional, social, and practical issues. Understanding the critical role supportive care plays in improving cancer patients' overall quality of life, this book explores the essential elements of a patient-centric approach. Evidence-based procedures, recommendations, and the incorporation of patient viewpoints are all included in the suggested blueprint for patient-centric oncology care. Healthcare professionals may improve cancer patients' quality of life, foster resilience, and help create a more sympathetic and caring healthcare system by adopting an all-encompassing approach. In the end, the paper makes the case for the broad implementation of supportive oncology as a crucial part of cancer treatment, enabling patients to face their ordeal with dignity and resiliency.

Keywords: Supportive oncology, Empathy, Advocacy

INTRODUCTION

Cancer necessitates a comprehensive approach that goes beyond medical therapies because of its varied impact on persons and communities. In this publication, we explore the wide range of interventions aimed at improving the lives of cancer patients, delving into the complex fabric of oncology support. Our emphasis is on empathy, innovation, and holistic well-being, and it goes beyond the boundaries of conventional medical interventions to encompass a wider range of supporting care.¹⁻³

As oncology advances, our comprehension of the crucial function that support serves during the cancer journey must also keep pace with this evolution. This paper proposes to offer a pathway for cancer patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals from the time of initial diagnosis to survivorship. It provides insights into the most recent developments in cancer support, evidence-based practices, and compassionate approaches.⁴⁻⁶

We negotiate the intricacies of the psychological, logistical, and physical obstacles that people with cancer must overcome, realizing the critical role that a robust support network plays in building resilience and enhancing overall results.

We investigate the combination of cutting-edge technologies, psychosocial therapies, and community resources to develop a strong framework for oncology support, drawing on the synergy of scientific achievements and human compassion.

The goal of this paper is to bridge the gap between the demands of cancer patients and medical treatments by adding to the ongoing conversation about cancer care. Our goal is to provide activists, researchers, and healthcare professionals with a more comprehensive understanding of the complex world of oncology support by fusing science, empathy, and useful advice. This will ultimately improve the lives of those who are dealing with cancer.

ROADMAP: NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE OF ONCOLOGY SUPPORT

Understanding the cancer journey

Establishing a diagnosis

The most neglected stage of the cancer journey is pre-diagnosis. However, the worry associated with receiving a potential cancer diagnosis can be intolerable for a great deal of oncology patients. You go to your general practitioner because you are having strange symptoms, including sweating or coughing at night. These symptoms are identified by your doctor as early indicators of malignancy. A standard cancer screening test result (such as a mammography, Pap smear, or colonoscopy) is abnormal. For more advanced care, your doctor might send you to a cancer expert or order a biopsy immediately to help with diagnosis. Further diagnostic imaging tests, such as fluoroscopies, PET scans, MRIs, mammograms, and ultrasounds, may also be requested by him or her.^{4,7}

Cancer treatment planning

Comprehending the extent of your illness enables oncologists and other healthcare providers to suggest efficacious cancer treatment approaches, such as surgery, radiation therapy, or chemotherapy. You ultimately decide how you want to treat your cancer, though. When you and your doctor decide on a course of therapy, be sure you are aware of all of your options and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

You will schedule follow-up visits with your oncologist every three to six months for the first several years following the completion of treatment. Monitoring for the recurrence of cancer is the primary goal of follow-up care.

Taking care of the long-term effects of cancer treatment is another objective of follow-up care. Sadly, there is a chance that life-saving treatments like radiation and chemotherapy will result in mild to severe adverse effects. Your physician will assist you in identifying and managing any side effects.

Integrative oncology support

Integrative oncology is a patient-focused method of treating cancer that blends evidence-based alternative therapies with traditional treatments. Enhancing the patient's physical, mental, and spiritual health is the aim. Natural goods, lifestyle counseling, mind-body techniques, dietary adjustments, and lifestyle modifications are some examples of integrative oncology.

Conventional cancer treatments, such as radiation and chemotherapy, can be beneficial, but they frequently have a number of uncontrollable side effects. This is where a comprehensive approach to cancer treatment, incorporating IV therapy and dietary modifications, can

have a big impact. The goal of a holistic approach to cancer care is to treat the patient as a whole, not just the illness. This entails treating the disease's emotional and spiritual components in addition to its physical manifestations.^{8,9}

IV treatment is one of the most effective techniques in a comprehensive cancer care provider's toolbox. With IV therapy, a powerful combination of vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients are administered straight into the bloodstream, avoiding the digestive tract and maximizing absorption. For cancer patients, who can have trouble absorbing nutrition because of the side effects of radiation or chemotherapy, this can be especially crucial. Other integrative care plans acupuncture, aromatherapy, music therapy, massage, mind-body practices helps in achieving the goals.^{10,11}

Innovations in supportive oncology

A single clinical specialty cannot provide supportive oncology on its own; instead, a committed core team is required to address daily issues, with assistance from other disciplines as needed, similar to other cancer multidisciplinary teams. Certain cancer centers in the United States have implemented this paradigm, wherein supportive oncology specialists offer "day to day" care throughout the whole treatment process, encompassing curative treatment, rehabilitation, and survivorship care.

However, the "new discipline of supportive care" has been acknowledged for the first time in the UK palliative medicine school curriculum (2022), suggesting that skills acquired in palliative care may be applicable to various stages of the cancer spectrum. More and more palliative care doctors, particularly those employed by cancer centers, are broadening their areas of expertise by adding "supportive care physician" to their titles. The expansion of cancer survivorship programs, acute oncology, integrative oncology, geriatric oncology, cancer rehabilitation, and supportive oncology programs—many of which include palliative care specialists—coincides with this. With a little "tweaking" and enthusiasm, palliative medicine might offer the leadership required to support the expansion and advancement of these programs.^{12,13}

We now face a much-anticipated "positive" global challenge in cancer: greater life expectancies due to improved treatments. Now is the moment to make sure people can live healthy lives, have access to prompt and appropriate care, and have the infrastructure they need to support themselves across the whole spectrum of the disease thanks to investments in supportive oncology. To put it succinctly, a revolution is required if we are to fulfill the fundamental goal of providing excellent cancer care.

Empathy in oncology support

The human touch of high-touch cancer care perfectly balances the wonders of high-tech cancer treatment. Small

acts of kindness can go a long way toward improving patient outcomes by reducing the unpleasant feelings that are often connected to cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Cancer care is an emotionally charged service that is marked by high levels of intricacy, long wait times, feelings of helplessness, and severe implications in the event that something goes wrong. Stress, anxiety, and fear at unusually high levels are prevalent.

An oncologist should listen intently to their patients, taking the time to fully comprehend their needs and concerns. They should also show empathy for cancer patients, which can be demonstrated by individual clinicians as well as by the care culture, which aims to prevent needless suffering; they should show generosity by going above and beyond what patients and families expect from a care team; they should provide timely care by utilizing a variety of stress-reduction tools and systems; they should be gentle in their honesty, delivering the truth in a way that is unambiguous and guiding; and they should provide support for family caregivers, whose physical and mental health are essential to the care their loved ones receive.

Behaving with generosity and empathy can benefit patients and their families as well as physicians and other staff members. Empathy for others reduces stress, according to research. The supportive atmosphere that is produced by showing kindness to others, enhances the well-being of providers and can be a powerful remedy for both mental and physical tiredness as well as burnout.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

Community resources and advocacy

Worldwide efforts to prevent and control cancer are essential since the prevalence of cancer and other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) is rising. Furthermore, the international health and development community has changed its understanding to include NCDs as a global health priority since the 2011 United Nations High-Level Meeting on NCDs, particularly in developing nations where mortality rates are disproportionately high. The international cancer community has realized the need of including patients in lowering the worldwide cancer burden at the same time that the World Cancer Declaration has been widely disseminated and cancer control policies have evolved. There are more potential for cancer advocacy campaigns including patients, survivors, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to have a global influence.^{17,18}

CONCLUSION

An appeal for action. A summary of the main findings is presented in the manuscript's conclusion, highlighting the significance of an all-encompassing and caring strategy for cancer support. We make a call to action, imploring researchers, policymakers, and healthcare providers to put the tactics described in the manuscript into practice and

keep developing them. The ultimate objective is to stimulate constructive transformation in the oncology support environment by cultivating a culture of care that goes beyond medical interventions.

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