

---

# Pre-Appointment Nurse Navigation

Patient-centered findings from a survey of patients with breast cancer

Tianyi Wang, BA, Yash S. Huilgol, BA, Janet Black, BSN, RN, OCN®, Carrie D'Andrea, BSN, RN, Jennifer James, PhD, MSW, MSSP, Anna Northrop, BA, Jeff Belkora, PhD, and Laura J. Esserman, MD, MBA

**BACKGROUND:** Research indicates that nurse navigators can play key roles in promoting empowerment for patients with cancer through advocacy, educational support, resource navigation, and psychosocial care.

**OBJECTIVES:** This study attempted to elucidate the efficacy of nurse navigation in patient knowledge, care coordination, and well-being before a breast oncology appointment.

**METHODS:** Staff provided a nine-question survey to 50 newly referred patients before their initial appointment. After survey completion, patients had the option to participate in an open-ended interview about their experience.

**FINDINGS:** A greater proportion of patients with initial nurse navigation than those without felt informed before their appointment and thought that their care was effectively coordinated. Although some patients without nurse navigation experienced delays and confusion in scheduling their appointment, no patients with nurse navigators reported such issues.

## KEYWORDS

nurse navigation; breast cancer; patient knowledge; care coordination; well-being

## DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/21.CJON.E57-E62

**WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PUTTING THE EFFICACY** of U.S. hospital workflow to the test, a streamlined and patient-centered workflow is an essential part of optimizing patient care and well-being. A nurse navigator is an RN who can serve as a patient educator, coordinator, and advocate. In some centers, they serve as the point person throughout a patient's entire treatment process. In others, they provide the first point of contact with patients before their first appointment. Nurse navigators can play key roles in promoting empowerment in patients with cancer, and patients with longitudinal nurse navigators have indicated better information, care coordination, and psychosocial care than patients with cancer who receive enhanced usual care (Jeyathevan et al., 2017; Wagner et al., 2014).

Adequate knowledge allows patients to have an active role in their care, which has been shown to increase perceived level of control and improve fatigue, depression, anxiety, and quality of life in patients with cancer (Schulman-Green et al., 2012). Therefore, there is value to optimally informing patients with cancer and creating a foundation of knowledge early in their cancer journey.

Effective care coordination is key to quality care, particularly in the breast care setting, which involves various treatment modalities and specialists. Nurse navigators can integrate services and address the fragmented nature of the health system for patients with complex chronic conditions (Byrne et al., 2020). For patients with cancer in particular, patients with four-month-long nurse navigator interventions have reported fewer problems in care coordination (Wagner et al., 2014).

Patients face a multitude of emotions and confusion during not only their initial cancer diagnosis, but also during subsequent hospital visits (Cuthbert et al., 2020; Sánchez et al., 2020). Anxiety and depression are the most prevalent psychosocial consequences after a cancer diagnosis (You et al., 2018). Longitudinal nurse navigators have been shown to lower levels of distress, anxiety, and depression in patients with breast cancer 12 months after diagnosis (Mertz et al., 2017).

Past studies show benefits of longitudinal nurse navigation in cancer care. There is a gap in the literature on whether experiencing nurse navigator contact only before an initial appointment has similar benefits. This study