Survivorship Care Plans: Necessary But Not Sufficient?

The Institute of Medicine’s (IOM’s) report From Cancer Patient to Cancer Survivor: Lost in Transition (Hewitt, Greenfield, & Stovall, 2006) was a seminal event for survivorship care, drawing attention to the myriad issues survivors face once treatment ends. The report included 10 recommendations, and one of them focused on survivorship care plans (SCPs), which include a treatment summary and follow-up care plan (IOM, 2005). This was a consensus-based recommendation to facilitate coordination of cancer care between specialists and primary care providers, an essential component of survivorship care (IOM, 2005). Since then, the implementation of this recommendation has been sporadic at best, being adopted by some practices and providers for some patients some of the time (Birken, Mayer, & Weiner, 2013; Forsythe et al., 2013). Reasons for poor adoption have included the length of time it takes to complete SCPs, lack of systems to make the process easier, and lack of reimbursement.

When the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer released their new standards in 2012, they called for the implementation of SCP in accredited programs by 2015. Specifically, standard 3.3 listed the following requirement:

- An SCP is prepared by the principal provider(s) who coordinated the oncology treatment for the patient with input from the patient’s other care providers.
- The SCP is given to the patient on completion of treatment.
- The written or electronic SCP contains a record of care received, important disease characteristics, and a follow-up.

FIGURE 1. Opportunities to Influence the Process of Care Across the Cancer Continuum

Note: Arrows represent transitions in care.

Processes of Care Across the Cancer Care Continuum

Types of Care

- Risk Assessment
  - Age
  - Family history
  - Exposure history
  - Genetics
  - Lifestyle
  - Screening history

- Primary Prevention
  - Lifestyle counseling
  - Chemo-therapy prevention

- Detection
  - Screening (asymptomatic)
  - Appropriate testing (symptomatic)

- Diagnosis
  - Imaging
  - Biopsy
  - Repeat examinations
  - Laboratory tests
  - Other procedures

- Cancer or Precursor Treatment
  - Excision
  - Surgery
  - Radiation
  - Adjuvant chemotherapy
  - Palliation

- Survivorship
  - Testing
  - Follow-up care
  - Palliation
  - Recurrence surveillance

- End-of-Life Care
  - Palliative care
  - Advanced care planning
  - Bereavement support

Transitions in Care

Each type and transition in care offers opportunities for improvement. Some have been identified in the figure, but within and between types of care are interfaces and steps that may be articulated to identify more opportunities. Effectiveness of the process is measured at the patient and population levels based on the outcomes shown. Differences in service delivery and effectiveness across populations are the metrics of disparities (equity).

Outcomes

- Patient
  - Risk status
  - Clinical status
  - Functional status
  - Quality of life
  - Satisfaction
  - Mortality
  - Quality of death

- Population
  - Financial burden
  - Experience


care plan incorporating available and recognized evidence-based standards of care, when available. The minimum care plan standards are included in Fact Sheet: Cancer Survivorship Care Planning from the IOM (Commission on Cancer, 2012; IOM, 2005).

Greater attention is now being paid to implementation issues, such as who should get an SCP, when it should be delivered, and who should develop and deliver it. In addition, questions have arisen about the need to include all the items identified in the original IOM fact sheet, which may make it more difficult to complete.

The original recommendations were based on the consensus that this would be good clinical practice. And this idea has been endorsed by many through surveys and focus groups. In fact, survivors have said that an SCP is necessary but not sufficient to meet their needs (Mayer, 2012). They also recognize evidence-based standards and care plan standards 2012, version 1.2: Ensuring patient-centered care. Retrieved from http://www.facs.org/cancer/coc/programstandards2012.html


We also must keep in mind that the SCP is a tool meant to facilitate communication and coordination of survivors’ care (see Figure 2). Only then will we be able to ask meaningful outcome questions. In the meantime, we must prepare to meet the 2015 standards as a step toward ensuring patient-centered cancer care.

FIGURE 2. Conceptual Framework for Survivorship Care Planning Research


References


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