

Cancer Navigation Foundations for CHWs

Community Health Workers, or CHWs, play an important role in helping a person navigate a cancer diagnosis. This CHW Quick Guide will help CHWs:

- 1 Understand key terms about cancer so they can clearly explain them to others.
- 2 Provide quality navigation to all people impacted by cancer.

Cancer-Related Terms & Explanations along the Roadmap of the Cancer Journey

DIAGNOSIS

Cancer Stages: A cancer stage refers to the extent of the cancer, and is determined by the cancer's size, growth, its location, and if it has spread from its original location. Knowing the stage of cancer can help understand how serious the cancer diagnosis is and the chances of survival, determine a plan for treatment, and identify clinical trials that may be good options.

Metastatic vs. Nonmetastatic Cancer: Metastatic means that the cancer has spread from the original location to other parts of the body. Non metastatic means that the cancer has not spread from its original location to other parts of the body.

Mental Health Distress screening: Distress screening identifies people at risk for mental health concerns like anxiety or depression. If left unaddressed, distress can lead to poor clinical outcomes, including reduced quality of life. For people facing a cancer diagnosis, it is especially critical to screen for these concerns as they are at higher risk than the general population for both anxiety and depression.

Biomarker Testing: A biomarker is a sign of disease or abnormal function that can be measured in your blood, tissue, or bodily fluid. In cancer, biomarkers are often used to help choose the best treatment.

PREVENTION/SCREENING

Healthy lifestyle choices: While not all cancer can be prevented, making healthy lifestyle choices like eating a balanced diet, moving your body regularly, and building strong community ties can help protect against cancer.

Genetics & Cancer Risk Factors – Genetics play a role in cancer, but only about 5 to10% of all cancer cases occur in someone who inherited a genetic mutation that increases cancer risk. Genetic testing can be an important part of preventing or detecting cancer early.

Screening: Cancer screening tests can help find some types of cancer before it causes symptoms, when the cancer may be more easily treated. For certain cancers, self-exams can also be a helpful practice. Currently, early screening tests exist for only 5 cancers:

Cancer Type	Screening Test
Colorectal cancer	Colonoscopy
Cervical cancer	Pap smear
Breast cancer	Mammography
Lung cancer	Spiral computed tomography (CT) scan
Prostate cancer	Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test

TREATMENT

Chemotherapy: Chemotherapy (also called chemo) is a treatment that uses drugs to destroy or damage fast-growing cells like cancer cells. It is used to shrink tumors, slow cancer's growth, relieve symptoms, or help people live longer. Chemotherapy drugs are given in different ways (intravenously, orally by a pill, or by injection).

Radiation: Radiation Therapy uses high-energy x-rays or other types of radiation to kill cancer cells or keep them from growing. A patient will receive radiation therapy internally or externally depending on the type and stage of cancer being treated.

Immunotherapy: Immunotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that uses the body's natural defenses (immune system) to identify, attack, and kill cancer cells.

Clinical Trials: Clinical trials are used to find out if a new treatment is effective and can be a good option for people who are interested in getting access to the newest cancer treatments, diagnosed at an advanced stage, no longer responding to other treatments, or are at a high risk for recurring or spreading after primary treatment.

SURVIVORSHIP

The word survivorship means different things to different people. The National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship defines a cancer survivor as someone who lives with, through and beyond cancer. Other definitions focus on the time after active treatment through the rest of one’s life. Survivors’ focus shifts from treatment to follow up care.

RECURRENCE

Recurrence means the return of cancer. The fear of cancer coming back is normal. Encourage folks to stay in communication with their healthcare team and report any new signs or symptoms lasting more than 2 weeks.

Types of Cancer

- 1 Breast
- 2 Prostate
- 3 Lung
- 4 Colon and Rectal
- 5 Melanoma

Key Support Team

A patient’s healthcare team can include doctors, nurses, social workers, and other professionals. This is often called “multidisciplinary care”. Working with a multidisciplinary care team is important because each professional will bring specialized knowledge and a different set of skills. A diverse skill set is helpful when deciding how to treat cancer and manage its side effects.

A cancer patient will have many members in their cancer care team and members on the care team may vary at different points in the cancer journey. These members may include:

Oncology Specialists: Oncologist, Radiation Oncologist, Surgical Oncologist, Oncology Nurse, Oncology Pharmacist, Oncology Dietitian/ Nutritionist	Other Healthcare Professionals: Nutritionist/ Dietitian, Exercise Specialist, Nurse Navigator, Primary Care Physician, Physical & Occupational Therapists	Extended Support: Mental Health Providers, Integrative Health Specialists (massage, acupuncture), Lymphedema specialist, Community Health Workers, Financial Navigator, Social Worker	Community & Support Networks: Faith-based leaders, Caregivers, Support Groups, Family and Friends
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Three things CHWs can do to better support people impacted by cancer:

- 1 **Educate** patients with information that inspires hope. For example, encourage a patient to get their annual screening by sharing the % of people who receive a diagnosis from a screening, the % of patients that recover from a diagnosis, and/or the % of patients that experience a recurrence.
- 2 **Encourage** patients to prepare for and attend their appointments, both during and after treatment. The 2-3 weeks leading up to the appointment is an important time for patients to plan the logistics of attending, like transportation, and supporting their mental health.
- 3 **Empower** patients with resources to make decisions about their care. This includes information on improving communication with healthcare teams, making treatment decisions, and navigating the cost of cancer.

Cancer Support Community Resources

National Suicide Prevention Hotline (U.S.)
800-273-8255 or 988

Suicide Prevention Service (Canada)
833-456-4566 or text 45645

AONN+
<https://aonnonline.org/>

American Cancer Society
800-227-2345
www.Cancer.org

Cancer Support Community
1-888-793-9355
www.CancerSupportCommunity.org

Cancer Support Helpline®
Have questions, concerns or looking for resources? Call CSC’s toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793- 9355), available in 200 languages.

Frankly Speaking about Cancer®
Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs.
<https://orders.cancersupportcommunity.org/>

Local CSCs and Gilda’s Clubs
With the help of nearly 200 locations, CSC and Gilda’s Club affiliates provide services free of charge to people impacted by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more:
www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation-Near-You

Coping with Mental Health Concerns
<https://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/coping-mental-health-concerns>

National Alliance for Caregiving
www.Caregiving.org

National Comprehensive Cancer Network
www.nccn.org

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship
<https://canceradvocacy.org/>

Open to Options®
Helping a patient prepare for their next appointment? Our trained specialists can help create a list of questions to share with a doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda’s Club.

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