



Supporting Patient Navigation in Times of Uncertainty

Most people are creatures of habit. When things go as planned, we feel in control. But when life becomes uncertain, as it currently is with the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, it can leave us feeling anxious and stressed. The Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators would like to offer the following tips that could be helpful to navigators in taking care of themselves and their patients.

For the Navigator

- Communication with your patients with cancer may be less in-person and more through phone, e-mail, EMRs, and/or patient portals. Try to make your communication conversational, just as it would be if you were seeing the patient face-to-face. Talk with them about ways they would be comfortable connecting if you can't see them in person
- Each institution is establishing protocols and expectations during this crisis. Make sure you have the most current guidance about specific methods of communication you will be advised to use
- If your institution has video-based communications tools or telemedicine platforms, inquire with administrators and communications departments about what might be available for you to use. You might need to make a case for having access to these platforms – so be prepared to provide information on your critical role in patient care. This way, a warm friendly face can be seen by your patients in a newly established regular routine, and urgently, if needed. These connections become even more critical in times such as this, when patients may feel even more disconnected
- Other ways of communicating, such as text messaging or remote access to your organization's phone system, may be options. If you don't already use text messaging with your patients, ask your administrators if there is a secure text messaging system you could use with your patients.

For the Patient

- Advise your patient to continue with their normal daily routine or assist them in creating a new routine to help reduce anxiety and provide a sense of control
- Ensure that patients are adhering to their medication schedule because changes in their normal daily routine may cause them to forget to take their medications as prescribed. Online apps or tools are available to set a reminder on their phones
- Patients can easily become overwhelmed with the amount of information they are receiving from television, social media, and newspapers. It is important to provide your patients with reputable resources that have been approved or recommended by your cancer facility. Check in with your patients to make sure they have the ability to access them

- In addition to information about COVID-19 and how your organization is addressing the pandemic with your patients, there may be other information needs (eg, managing their disease, stress management) that can be addressed through online programs and resources
- Organizations and websites that provide online resources and programs including support groups) include:
 - CancerCare www.cancer.org
 - Cancer Support Community www.cancersupportcommunity.org
 - American Cancer Society www.cancer.org
 - National Cancer Institute www.cancer.gov
 - Additional resources are available in the AONN+ COVID-19 Navigation [Toolkit](#).

It may also be important that patients find other ways to engage in activities that bring joy and enrichment as a distraction during this challenging time. Many museums are offering free online tours and programs. Remind your patients to ask for support – such as having a neighbor go grocery shopping for them. Getting out for a short walk and keeping in touch with family, friends, and other patients through phone and video calls (FaceTime) or social media are other ways to cope.

As this public health crisis continues to unfold, we all continue to find ways to support patients and ourselves. We would like to hear from you to learn what you are doing to meet the needs of patients in these uncertain times. Post your comments on the [Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators Facebook Group](#)!

References:

- CancerCare www.cancer.org
- Cancer Support Community www.cancersupportcommunity.org
- American Cancer Society www.cancer.org
- National Cancer Institute www.cancer.gov

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