

# The Art of the Path: Creative Value in Oncology Navigation

By Ariel V. Welter, OPN-CG

The treatment plan was clear, yet the bus route remained uncertain. The reliability of an estranged child or distant relative was equally unpredictable. The ability to afford an additional 20 dollars for a cab or Uber to travel the final miles from the bus stop to the clinic was often out of reach. When a patient in a rural community missed consecutive appointments due to a literal dead end in local transit, lack of family support, or financial hardship, the medical, billing, or administrative team might have labeled them as non-compliant. *The oncology navigator, however, recognized a complex problem to solve.*

By the fourth appointment, the navigator had not only secured transportation but also coordinated with a local church volunteer and obtained a fuel voucher, transforming these resources into a lifeline. This demonstrates that in oncology, the path to healing relies as much on creative problem-solving as on clinical protocols. This exemplifies the creative significance inherent in navigation.

In the modern healthcare system, a cancer diagnosis is just the first door in a labyrinth. Studies show that patient

navigation programs can improve treatment initiation, logistical, financial and emotional barriers by up to 70%, yet the most impactful work often happens off the charts or chats. It is the 'inventiveness' and community connection of navigators acting as a human bridge between an often rigid medical culture and a patient's chaotic reality. That is what transforms a fragmented process into a cohesive journey.

”

*...in oncology, the path to healing relies as much on creative problem-solving as on clinical protocols.*

*This exemplifies the creative significance inherent in navigation.*

”

If the provider or oncologist serves as the architect of the treatment plan, the oncology navigator assumes the role of shaping the patient experience. While scientific evidence offers the foundational blueprint, effective navigation requires intuition, empathy, and adaptability to guide patients and families through a dynamic and evolving care landscape. This process extends beyond logistical coordination; it represents the art of facilitating the patient journey. Every

patient deserves this comprehensive approach to optimize outcomes and support the work of all of their medical professionals.

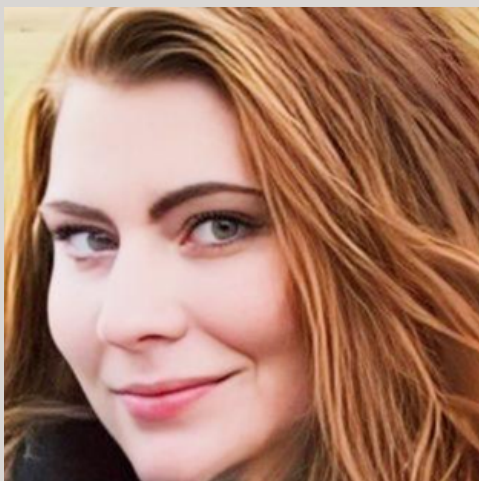
What is the value of a 'gate opener' within a healthcare system that can appear inaccessible? This certainly warrants consideration. Although metrics such as reduced emergency department visits and improved treatment adherence are commonly used to assess effectiveness, the core value of oncology navigation often resides in less quantifiable domains. Specifically, navigators employ creative strategies to translate complex medical terminology and plans into accessible information, and to help patients reframe a daunting diagnosis as a manageable care plan. We must act in successfully facilitating the plan to ensure the treatment plan.

**This is the importance of the art of patient navigation.**

**References:**

Hunnibell LS, Nicaj L, Kanis AL, et al. Patient navigation in cancer treatment: a systematic review. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2024;74(3):214-235. doi:10.1111/caac.21821

Pratt-Chapman ML, Willis A, Massie J. Establishing effective patient navigation programs in oncology. *Oncology (Williston Park)*. 2019;33(3):116-121. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8811719/>



Ariel is a bladder cancer navigator for Minnesota Urology, recognized as the largest independent, private urology practice in the Upper Midwest. It includes 52+ providers across 24 clinic locations in Minnesota and Western Wisconsin, focusing on comprehensive adult urology and clinical research. After 'on-the-clock hours,' Ariel finds immense fulfillment in the arts. Specifically, engaging in watercolor painting, violin and guitar musical creation, along with poetry.