



Supporting Cancer Patients and Survivors Through Implementation of Evidence-Based Palliative Care Interventions

Background

The American Cancer Society estimates that 5,330 individuals will be diagnosed with cancer in South Dakota in 2021.¹ The American Society of Clinical Oncology recommends referral of all patients diagnosed with advanced cancer to palliative care within eight weeks of diagnosis. Palliative care facilitates discussions about goals of care, advanced care planning, and symptom management. Early access to palliative care enhances overall patient care and provides support from the time of diagnosis.

The Comprehensive Cancer Control Program within the SD Department of Health (SDDOH) released a request for applications targeting organizations interested in partnering to implement evidence-based interventions that align with the priorities of the SD Cancer Plan 2015-2020 to reduce the burden of cancer in the state. Sanford Cancer Center was awarded \$20,000 in funding and received technical assistance to support project implementation and evaluation.

Project Summary

Sanford implemented project efforts at their cancer treatment center located in Sioux Falls, SD. Sanford Cancer Center serves over 2,200 individuals newly diagnosed with cancer each year; over 70% of these patients reside in South Dakota. Project efforts included implementing an outpatient palliative care navigation program, workflow, and referral process for cancer patients. The cancer treatment center increased system changes and the provision of palliative care services for cancer patients and survivors through project implementation. The project period was January 1, 2020–December 31, 2020.

Outcomes

Sanford Cancer Center provided system-level data at baseline and quarterly throughout the project. The data presented in this section was compiled from grantee reports. In 2020, 433 patients were screened using the outpatient palliative care checklist. The average patient age was 64.7 years. Using the checklist, 198 patients screened positive, and 89 patients were referred to palliative care. 55% of patients who received a palliative care referral completed the visit. The average number of days from diagnosis to referral was 22. Over 85% of patients within the target population completed advanced care planning documents within one month of the palliative care visit. COVID-19 impacted project efforts in several ways. Sanford Cancer Center reported an unprecedented demand for inpatient palliative care consults and a high volume of new cancer patients who delayed care and experienced delayed diagnosis. Additionally, project efforts were temporarily paused during the project due to staff redirection for pandemic planning and response efforts.

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References

1. American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2021. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2021