

Communication and Cancer

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1. The emotional impact of cancer and the complexity of current care options mean that effective communication is vital to the provision of holistic, patient-centred care and working as part of a cancer care team to improve outcomes by increasing treatment compliance, improving psychological adjustment (reducing anxiety and depression), and increasing satisfaction with care (1,2).
2. Effective communication in cancer care aims to improve patient recall of information, understanding of prognosis, clear establishment of goals of care, and facilitate shared decision-making, by providing opportunities to discuss values and preferences (3,4).
3. Consider communication style and skills, the contexts in which you work (multidisciplinary team meetings, providing therapy, inpatient or outpatient clinical care), and the aim of your communication (to reach decisions about care, to share information or learn, to provide support).
4. Communication skills can be learned, and a number of communication skills training (CST) programs focusing on known difficult topics in cancer care have been evaluated, e.g., responding to emotions, end of life issues, role of complementary therapies, cancer and fertility (5-10). Current evidence is unclear on the most effective content, format or intensity of CST in oncology but it is clear that CST can improve skills (11-12).
5. Available tools to support communication between patients, cancer care health professionals and families include question prompt lists (QPLs), decision aids/ decision support tools (DAs/DSTs), patient reported outcome (PRO) measures, consultation audio-recordings, survivorship care plans (13-14). Health professional encouragement and support (endorsement) of tools such as QPLs provided to patients before consultations reduces anxiety and increases their use by patients (15).

Examples

- **Question Prompt Lists** - Questions to ask your oncologist
<https://www.cancer.nsw.gov.au/about-cancer/document-library/medical-radiation-oncologist-question-list>
- **Decisions Aids** - Cancer, Fertility and Me: Helping you make the right decision for you.
<https://decisionaid.ohri.ca/Azsumm.php?ID=1921>
<https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/cancerfertilityandme/>
- **Patient Reported outcome measures** -Edmonton Symptom Assessment System Revised (ESAS-r)
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5337174/>
- **Survivorship Care plans** - ASCO Survivorship care plan
<https://www.cancer.net/survivorship/follow-care-after-cancer-treatment/asco-cancer-treatment-and-survivorship-care-plans>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7011634/>

6. An additional issue to consider is the role of family/significant others in communication about cancer, as it is important to balance patient confidentiality, support network needs, and hone skills in managing these when planning treatment and care. (16-18)

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