

North Colorado Medical Center

by Julianne Fritz, RN, OCN

North Colorado Medical Center, a Banner Health facility, is a 398-bed community hospital that serves Greeley, Colorado, a city with a population of 89,046, and is a tertiary referral center for northeastern Colorado, southeastern Wyoming, and western Nebraska. The hospital includes a 20-bed inpatient hematology oncology unit, an outpatient infusion center with 12 chairs (treatment bays) and two private infusion bays, and comprehensive radiation oncology services that include IMRT, Rapid Arc, OBI, HDR brachytherapy, and a prostate implant program. The cancer registry documents between 650 and 700 new cancer cases annually.

Historically, North Colorado Medical Center has worked with an independent medical oncology group via a group practice with five physicians to support a regional approach. In the summer of 2010, North Colorado Medical Center began transitioning to a clinical employment model that will employ a total of three additional medical oncologists. Radiation oncology has also moved to an employment model, away from the contracting model used previously.

At North Colorado Medical Center, all RNs in radiation oncology are OCN certified, as are all RNs who work in the outpatient program, as well as the oncology research nurses. The oncology research nurses also carry a CCRP certification. On the inpatient floor, 78 percent of nurses



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NORTH COLORADO MEDICAL CENTER

North Colorado Medical Center implemented a patient navigation program to formalize transitions of care from the inpatient to the outpatient setting. Pictured (on L) is patient navigator Sue Fagerlund, RN, OCN.

Figure 1. North Colorado Medical Center Patient Navigator Intake Form

Patient Name:		
Address:		
D.O.B.	Age:	Social Security No.
Phone Numbers: Can messages be left?		
Home:	Work:	Cell:
Emergency contact person:		Relationship:
Cancer History:		
Type of Cancer:		Metastases:
Stage:		Date of Diagnosis:
Status: New	Ongoing Tx Recurrence	Post Tx
		Date of Recurrence:
Treatment:		
Surgery/Type:	Dates:	Surgeon:
Chemotherapy/Drugs:	Dates:	Physician:
Radiation Site(s):	Dates:	Physician:
Financial Information:		
Primary Ins:		Secondary Ins:
Referral Source:	Date of Referral:	

are OCN certified. A patient navigator and oncology social worker round out the inpatient support team and service both inpatient and outpatient settings.

Overall Transition Policy and Activities

North Colorado Medical Center has adopted a team approach to whole-patient care and communication based on the model outlined in *Relationship-Based Care: A*

Model for Transforming Practice.¹ The model is built on six key concepts:

1. The essence of caring based on human connections
2. A therapeutic relationship between the patient, family, and the healthcare professional is core to safe, quality care
3. Knowledge of self and self-care
4. Healthy work relationships and environment

Figure 2. North Colorado Medical Center Patient Navigator Referral Form

Referral Date:		Referral Source:	
Patient Name:		D.O.B.:	Age:
Patient Notified of Referral:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	If no-why?
Phone:	Home:	Work:	Cell:
Surgeon/Physician			
Diagnosis:			
Patient Notified of Diagnosis	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	If no-why?
Date of Diagnosis:			
Reason For Referral:			
Financial			
<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate or lack of insurance coverage			
<input type="checkbox"/> Precertification problems			
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty paying bills			
<input type="checkbox"/> Need for financial assistance from Medicaid/Medicare/Cicp/Cobra			
<input type="checkbox"/> Confusing financial paperwork			
<input type="checkbox"/> Need for prescription assistance			
<input type="checkbox"/> Need for medical equipment/supplies			
<input type="checkbox"/> Citizenship problems/undocumented status			
Disease Management			
<input type="checkbox"/> Treatment compliance issues(missed appointments, unwillingness to take medicine)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Needs help with obtaining a second opinion (if desired by patient)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Does not understand treatment plan/procedures			
<input type="checkbox"/> Requesting attendance at MD appointments			
<input type="checkbox"/> Needs assistance to talk to providers (MD, nurse or insurance)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational information			
Psychosocial			
<input type="checkbox"/> Mental health services needed			
<input type="checkbox"/> Clergy			
Nutritional Counseling			
<input type="checkbox"/> Assistance with tube feeding/supplies			
Transportation			
<input type="checkbox"/> Public transportation			
<input type="checkbox"/> Private transportation			
For Questions, Please Call: (include name and phone number)			

5. Empowerment and ownership of work and practice
6. Appreciation openly expressed.

Following the relationship-based care model, inpatient oncology nursing staff takes active ownership of whole-patient care, which entails a strong communication component. Three key elements are: patient education, patient navigation, and post-discharge follow-up.

Patient Education

Before patients are discharged from the hospital oncology floor, each patient is provided with an oncology patient education packet that is tailored to the individual patient and includes his or her plan of care. The RN in charge of each patient's care works to ensure that the patient understands the plan of care and the right telephone numbers to call for specific situations. The nurse verifies that the information is

Figure 3. North Colorado Medical Center Patient Navigation Worksheet

Programs and Applications for Assistance

Name of organization	Application given to patient	Received from patient	Fax/mailed to organization	Result
Cancer Care				
RMCC				
Raymond Wentz				
Sense of Security				
Friends of Man				
HealthWell				
Leukemia/Lymphoma				
Patient Access Network Foundation				
PAF-Patient Assistance Foundation				
American Cancer Society				
Other:				
Other:				
Other:				
Other:				
Other:				
Other:				

understood by asking the patient to share back what he or she understands. This practice ties in with the hospital’s commitment to help patients become their own best advocates.

Patient Navigation

In 2008 North Colorado Medical Center implemented a patient navigator program to formalize transitions of care from the inpatient to outpatient setting. Working as a team with oncology social workers and oncology nurses, the patient navigator, who is an oncology-certified RN, visits the patient in the room prior to discharge. The patient navigator uses an intake form (Figure 1, page 40) to assess the patient’s needs, and then explains the resources available. The patient navigator assesses the needs of new oncology patients and makes referrals to other services. (See Patient Navigator Referral Form, Figure 2, page 41.) A Patient Navigation Worksheet (Figure 3, above) serves as a checklist to ensure that all aspects of a patient’s care are evaluated and applications to appropriate programs have been completed and sent to the appropriate community organization. The patient navigator also makes referrals, as needed, to financial, disease management, psychosocial, nutritional, and transportation services.

After Discharge Follow-up

Within 48 hours after discharge, clinical staff calls the patient to inquire about his or her status, to answer any questions the patient may have, and to ask for feedback. Patients are also given a journal to track their personal cancer journey that includes a medication list patients can bring to their first outpatient appointment. The whole program is designed to work in sync for the patient’s well-being.

Key Team Members

Working alongside the patient navigator is the oncology social worker who provides emotional support and counseling to oncology patients and families. The oncology social worker meets and assesses the needs of new oncology patients, plans and facilitates support groups, and works collaboratively with the patient navigator to meet identified needs of cancer patients. (See Oncology Social Work Referral Form, Figure 4, at right.)

North Colorado Medical Center holds inpatient multi-disciplinary team meetings every day to review patient care, transitions, and the overall plan of care for each patient. The team includes the primary nurse, CNAs, the patient navigator, the social worker, and care coordination. Physicians,

Figure 4. North Colorado Medical Center Oncology Social Work Referral Form

**Oncology Social Worker
Referral/Assessment for Psychosocial Services**

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Referred by _____

Phone Number _____

DOB/Age _____

Cancer Diagnosis _____

Date of Diagnosis _____

Physician _____

Cancer Specific Concerns

- Difficulty coping with diagnosis
- Lack of hope/loss of hope
- Fears related to treatments
- Fear of disease progression/death
- Other

Behavioral Issues

- Fear/Worry
- Anxiety/Nervousness
- Irritability
- Sadness/Depression
- Loss of Interest in People/Activities
- Anger
- Grief/Bereavement
- Use of Alcohol/Drugs
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Preoccupation with Death
- Prior History of Psychiatric Illness or Hospitalization
- Other

Spiritual/Religious Concerns

- Difficulty Relating to God
- Lack of/Loss of Faith or Peace
- Struggling with Issues about Guilt/Sin/Forgiveness
- Angry with God
- Concerns about Meaning/Purpose of Life
- Other

Financial/Practical Concerns

- Lodging
- Insurance
- Prescription Drug Assistance
- Medicaid
- Disability
- Living Will/POA
- Wigs/Prostheses Information
- Work Issues
- Child Care
- Meals on Wheels
- Transportation
- Home Health Care
- Living Alone/No Caregiver
- Other

Family Needs


- Spouse Having Difficulty Coping
- Children Need Support
- Significant Other with Difficulty Coping
- Other Family Member Needs Support
- Other

Interest in Mind Body Modalities/Stress Management

- Yoga
- Meditation/Guided Imagery
- Coping With Cancer
- Breast Cancer Support Group
- Man to Man Support Group
- Hearts of Hope Support Group
- Other

surgeons, and the hospital chaplain are included as needed for specific patient care planning needs. Two hospital-based pharmacists also work with the inpatient oncology team; to ensure continuity of pharmacy records, they also serve the outpatient cancer center. A recent quality initiative was implemented to develop a chemotherapy worksheet to ensure that orders are accurately checked after being entered into the hospital's order entry system.

North Colorado Medical Center focuses on excellent communication in a team-based approach as a key to smooth transitions. Achieving this success has required strong commitment from nursing leadership and hospital administra-

tion in terms of coaching, as well as tools and checklists to support the work. North Colorado Medical Center tracks patient satisfaction daily, and also incorporates the use of the discharge phone call responses. These are discussed at weekly patient satisfaction team meetings. 

Julianne Fritz, RN, OCN, is director of oncology services for North Colorado Medical Center in Greeley, Colorado.

References

¹Koloroutis M, ed. Relationship-based care: A model for transforming practice. Creative Health Care Management, 2004.