



New CoC Standards

Ready, Set, Go to Work Now!

by Virginia T. Vaitones, MSW, OSW-C

The journey took more than two years, but finally on August 31 the leadership of the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer (CoC) released new standards by which cancer programs are accredited. These standards are available online at: www.facs.org/cancer/coc/cocprogramstandards2012.pdf. In brief, the new standards focus on patient-centered care and include three key areas:

1. A patient navigation process to address healthcare disparities and barriers to care
2. Screening patients for psychosocial distress
3. A survivorship care plan that documents care received and seeks to improve cancer survivors' quality of life.

Additionally, new patient-centered standards have been developed that require accredited programs to offer patients palliative care (either on site or by referral) and genetic services by a qualified genetics professional (either on site or by referral).

Be advised, cancer programs cannot brush aside these patient-centered care standards simply because the CoC schedule posted on page 134 of the publication reads: "2015 phase in." The CoC Leadership and Accreditation Committee expect programs to start planning *now* to do the needed prep work for these standards. Does your community cancer center have a survey in 2012, 2013, or

2014? If so, the surveyor will want to know what you are doing to get ready for 2015. Lack of preparedness will be noted in the surveyor's final report.

Besides the patient-centered standards, hospitals will have to deal with a number of new standards or revisions in 2012, including public reporting, new requirements for quality studies, and new responsibilities for the cancer liaison physician, to name a few. Compliance takes time, money, and committed staff. We know from the pilot programs that staffing and funding are cancer programs' biggest concerns. Still, some programs have already left the starting gate and are being creative in meeting these new standards.

For the past two years I've had the opportunity and the challenge to work on these standards as the representative from the Association of Oncology Social Work (AOSW). Obviously, as an oncology social

worker I had a vested interest in these standards, but at the same time, working in a small, rural hospital, I wondered throughout the long process if my hospital would be able to meet these new standards.

I still wonder and worry. What I see as an opportunity will others at my hospital see as a deal breaker?

At ACCC's National Oncology Conference in Seattle, Washington, in October, I examined the new patient-centered standards and provided some suggestions on meeting these.

Be sure to take advantage of the following ACCC resources:

■ *ACCC's 7th Annual Hospital Summit*, Jan. 13, 2012, in Orlando.

ACCC Past President Luana Lamkin, RN, MPH, will present on the new CoC standards.

■ *Oncology Issues*. Articles on implementing palliative care programs in this edition of *Oncology Issues* and an upcoming article on how to use your cancer registry to

help in meeting new ACoS CoC standards, as well as other accreditation requirements.

■ *ACCCExchange* on MyNetwork. Members of this online discussion group have already posted questions and answers about meeting new CoC standards. ☺

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This column is adapted from the blog post "Don't Brush These Standards Aside" on ACCCBuzz.

