

## The Front Lines Radiation therapy's role in multidisciplinary, patient-centric care

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**A**s a senior radiation therapist at Wellspan Health's York Cancer Center in York, Pa., I have the great privilege to work with an amazing group of therapists who—as part of our multidisciplinary team—provide patient-centric care every day. At my program, radiation therapists take on the role of patient advocate with great vigor and compassion. Our main goal is to support and help patients through this very trying time in their lives. Fighting cancer is a very personal battle—one that most people think they will never have to face. It is both inspiring and humbling to support patients through this battle. When patients' course of therapy involves radiation oncology, radiation therapists are often the “face” of the cancer program. We play a crucial role in providing patient-centric care as we interact daily with patients, and we are in a unique position to ensure that patient needs are met and that their desires are taken into account during treatment.

From a patient's first visit to our offices for CT simulation, a radiation therapist is there to ease the way into the treatment process, answering questions from the patient and family on what to expect during simulation, as well as at daily treatment appointments. Many patients are apprehensive and anxious at the start of radiation therapy treatment. On that first day of simulation, as a radiation therapist, it is a great honor to support patients through this first “giant step” in the cancer treatment process. It has been my experience that patients often form a special attachment to their “simulation” therapist, as this staff


member was the first to guide them through a very personal experience.

Seeing patients five days a week allows radiation therapists a unique insight into how patients are feeling on a daily basis. We notice small changes in their behavior, as well as their general well-being, and can work quickly with the multidisciplinary team to get patients the interventions they need to alleviate pain, anxiety, dehydration, and/or psychosocial issues that may delay or interfere with treatment. Further, radiation therapists are able to advocate daily for our patients and voice their issues and concerns in between OTV (on-treatment visit) appointments.

Being on the front line in a patient-centric care environment allows radiation therapists the distinct advantage of getting to know our patients. We can let our multidisciplinary team members know when patients and family members need the services of our social workers, nurses, financial counselors, clergy, and transportation coordinators. Radiation therapists also play a critical role in communicating our patients' dietary needs to the appropriate staff. For example, with the majority of patients receiving CBCT (cone beam computed tomography) daily prior to treatment, radiation therapists are able to tell at a very early stage if patients are losing weight by looking at the CBCT contours and comparing them to the initial planning CT. This early intervention can help our dietitians and other support staff head off any rapid weight loss. Radiation therapists also see daily changes in tumor reduction that can cause a patient's anatomy to shift

and not line up correctly. If this occurs, a re-planning CT simulation is often needed to correct for the change in tumor volume.

With so many patients receiving chemotherapy—in addition to radiation therapy—radiation therapists often play an important role in intra-departmental collaboration that is key to coordinated, patient-centric care. For example this winter, when huge amounts of snow blanketed our community, some patients' chemotherapy treatments were canceled, while other patients were simply unable to travel to our center due to the weather conditions. Because of the excellent care coordination between our radiation and medical oncology staff, we were able to ensure that our patients were informed that they would be able to continue their treatment as planned.

For more than 10 years, I've had the great privilege of working side by side with my patients during their battle with cancer. I truly believe that radiation therapists play an integral role in the delivery of patient-centric, multidisciplinary care—the care our patients want and need and the care that payers are now beginning to require. 

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