

Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center
Integrating Technology and Navigation to Improve Care



Since its inception, patient navigation has been an important support for marginalized and disadvantaged patients facing a diagnosis of cancer. The Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center has been working to expand patient navigation and improve care coordination between the cancer center and community health centers in the Boston area. The cancer center is using a digital patient registry, TopCare (Technology for Optimizing Population Care in a Resource-limited Environment) and referrals from health centers to match newly diagnosed cancer patients with patient navigators. These specially trained professionals, in turn, work with patients to locate necessary resources, negotiate a complex health care system, and overcome barriers that could prevent them from accessing high-quality care. The navigation team works closely with patients who are more likely to have aggressive forms of cancer, to receive their diagnosis at more advanced stages, and to have higher rates of mortality.



Expansion of Care Coordination

- ✓ Developed (TopCare) patient registry to identify newly diagnosed cancer patients at higher risk of facing barriers to care
- ✓ Appointed primary care champions at three community health centers, improving coordination between oncology and primary care
- ✓ Implemented direct referrals from physician champions expanding navigation services to more cancer patients



“ One ... solution [is the TopCare registry] where we can actually figure out ... who’s been referred to the cancer center who have primary care physicians at the community health centers. The other is working with ... primary care physicians so that they’re aware of this program, so that if they [diagnose] a patient with cancer, they can communicate with us ”

Development of Lay Navigation Program

- ✓ Inclusion of multicultural and multilingual lay patient navigators
- ✓ Exploration of patients’ social barriers to care, such as food insecurity and housing instability
- ✓ Screening and monitoring of patients for symptoms of emotional and physical distress
- ✓ Development of virtual and in-person navigation during the COVID-19 pandemic



“ The navigators are in the cancer center, but they are part of this community, in a way, so they know our patients really well, and so they are the ones that now reach [out] to the cancer team ... ”