

Link Volunteer Navigator Program

Collaborating partners: St. Joseph Mercy Health System Cancer Centers, Cancer Support Community of Greater Ann Arbor and the American Cancer Society

Project description/outcomes: This volunteer program, based on the evidence-based Lay Health Advisor model, was developed initially in 2008. When St. Joseph Mercy Health System received a grant in 2014, this program grew to reach 779 of patients and caregivers, and was further extended in 2015 to include St. Joseph Mercy Brighton, Canton and Chelsea community cancer centers. The annual goal was to reach at least 1,600 patients and that number was far exceeded.

All three partner organizations collaborate to provide a comprehensive training to new volunteers, which, in addition to a thorough overview of psychosocial needs and resources, includes dedicated units on effective communication and cultural competence. Trainings and ongoing oversight by the program coordinator offer volunteers the opportunity to practice skills such as active listening, problem-solving and empathetic communication. When a volunteer meets with a patient and/or their family, the volunteer introduces them to all three organizations by offering brochures and information. For example, the American Cancer Society (ACS) offers a free "Personal Health Manager Kit" to any one diagnosed with cancer. The kits are diagnosis specific and provide both educational materials related to a patient's specific type of cancer as well as a filing system for patients to keep track of paperwork related to their cancer. American Cancer Society also offers transportation assistance, resource referrals, insurance assistance and other programs. From the Cancer Support Community (CSC), patients receive the current program calendar which shows them all the free psychosocial support programs offered, including support groups, exercise and stress management, educational workshops, and more. And finally, patients receive a St. Joseph Mercy Cancer Center Support brochure which talks about oncology social work, nurse navigation program, nutrition program, and more. When a patient is interested in receiving an ACS kit, speaking to a CSC staff member for individual psychosocial needs assessment, or other referrals, the volunteer helps them complete a standardized referral form which is faxed to ACS and CSC. This is essentially how volunteers "Link" patients to all the partners.

From 2014 through August, 2017, 969 referral forms were completed with 3995 contacts being made. While some patients see volunteers multiple times during the course of their treatment, each contact is counted to show each touch made.

Learn more:

Jordan Sheppard-Cusumano

Phone: 734-712-3113

Email: jordan.sheppard-cusumano@stjoeshealth.org