

Preface

When faced with a cancer diagnosis, patients often experience significant emotional distress and feelings of uncertainty about their future. They have to deal with complex medical information and make difficult, life-altering, treatment decisions. Patients with cancer and their family members hope to receive care within a health care system that would provide them with an environment of unfailing support and focus on meeting their needs as best as possible.

To facilitate the delivery of such “patient-centered” care and to enhance the National Cancer Institute’s (NCI) mission of reducing suffering due to cancer, the Outcomes Research Branch and the Health Communication and Informatics Research Branch of the Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences at NCI, have identified the assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the delivery of patient-centered communication between patients/family and health care delivery teams across the cancer care continuum as a key research priority.

Our prior work in the area of patient-clinician communication led us to identify the need for a comprehensive conceptual framework that would define core elements of patient-centered communication that could then be operationalized into standardized metrics for collecting data in diverse cancer care delivery settings. We also recognized the relative lack of understanding in the

current literature on potential mechanisms by which patient-centered communication is likely to result in optimal patient health outcomes. To address these issues and to lay the foundation for future innovative research in this area, we commissioned this monograph, *Patient-Centered Communication in Cancer Care: Promoting Healing and Reducing Suffering*.

The authors of the monograph, Ronald M. Epstein, MD, and Richard L. Street, Jr, PhD, have created a valuable piece of scholarship that has resulted from a critical synthesis of existing literature, the authors’ personal research experience of more than 25 years, as well as discussions with a number of internationally recognized experts in the area of communication, oncology, health care delivery, quality of care assessment, and patient advocacy who participated in a symposium on patient-centered communication in cancer care that was organized by NCI during the course of the monograph project.

Readers of the monograph should note that its focus is on optimizing communication processes between patients/family and health care delivery teams and not just the patient-physician dyad. Consequently, the authors’ conception of the term “patient-clinician communication” in this monograph is very broad, with the term “clinician” referring to all professionals who provide care to patients within the cancer context, not just physicians, and the term “patient” being used as a proxy for both the patient and their

family members who are involved in their care.

This monograph is a critical first step in our efforts to plan future NCI-funding opportunities that will facilitate innovative research studies in the area of patient-centered communication and patient outcomes. We hope researchers, practitioners, and policy makers will find it as beneficial in their respective work.

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