

We Hear You!

HOW PATIENT & STAFF FEEDBACK IMPROVED PROCESSES & SATISFACTION SCORES AT SOUTHWEST CANCER CENTER



In 2012 Southwest Cancer Center, part of UMC Health System, Lubbock, Tex., received an ACCC Innovator Award for its process improvement efforts. Read about the development and accomplishments of the cancer center's Patient Advisory Committee and Score Team.

The Patient Advisory Committee

Formed in March 2007, Southwest Cancer Center's Patient Advisory Committee is made up of patients and caregivers who meet monthly to discuss issues related to quality care and patient satisfaction. The committee's mission: to strengthen collaborations between patients and members of the healthcare team in order to enhance the cancer center's ability to deliver the highest standard of comprehensive and compassionate care. The Patient Advisory Committee shares needs and concerns with administration and staff and then works with both to make changes that will have a positive impact on patients and family members. To do so, the committee began by looking first at the cancer center's patient satisfaction questionnaire and asking two basic questions:

- What does the patient satisfaction survey actually mean to patients?
- What could be improved at the cancer center?

With this information in mind, Southwest Cancer Center was able to make significant process improvements related to scheduling, mentoring, cancer center design, survivorship, and more. In brief, here are a few of its successes.



Radiology Read Times

From the Patient Advisory Committee, staff learned that the most grueling time for patients was the wait time from when they receive an imaging study to the time they see a physician. Patients are nervous and scared. On average, patients were waiting 15 to 30 days between appointments. To improve the patient experience, Southwest Cancer Center had to first answer the question: What is a realistic time from radiology exam to physician visit? Staff, working together with the Patient Advisory Committee, was soon able to come to consensus on radiology read times. Today patients are scheduled to see a physician 72 hours (3 days) after the exam. For example, if the patient's imaging appointment is on a Friday, he or she will see a physician and receive the results on Monday. If the patient's appointment is on a Tuesday, he or she will be seen on Friday.

Patient Mentoring Program

The Patient Advisory Committee was instrumental in the development of the cancer center's patient mentoring program. Committee members actually came up with the wording for the mentoring program: "As a patient, wouldn't it be nice to have someone who has gone through the same cancer experience that you are now experiencing? Someone who understands how you're feeling and can provide cancer support? Someone who has 'been there and done that'?"

A cancer diagnosis is an overwhelming experience, and the cancer center's mentoring program is an outreach effort to help those newly-diagnosed patients. Mentors are cancer survivors who can offer comfort, reassurance, information, coping skills, positive strategies, and practical advice.

The process is simple. For patient confidentiality purposes, staff asks all newly-diagnosed patients if they are interested in having a mentor. If the answer is yes, staff then gives the patient's contact information to a mentor, who will contact the patient directly. Southwest Cancer Center has found that some of the relationships established in its patient mentoring program have lasted for years.

Cancer Center Design

Southwest Cancer Center has had two renovations since 1992, growing from a 16,000-square-foot facility to a 37,000-square-foot facility. The Patient Advisory Committee provided valuable feedback and input into the design of patient care areas. For example, committee members helped identify comfortable chemo chairs; the committee was also integral in the design of comfortable and friendly pediatric exam rooms.

Another joint project between staff and the Patient Advisory Committee is the cancer center's patient emergency cards. These cards contain vital patient information, includ-

ing chemo regimen and physician contact information. Now, no matter where patients are, if they have to seek treatment, the treating physician has all the necessary information right at his or her fingertips.

Survivorship Efforts

Another idea that came from the Patient Advisory Committee is the "chemo bell" in our chemotherapy department. When patients finish their treatment, they get to ring the bell. It's a big celebration for everyone—patients, families, and staff.

The committee was instrumental in the development of the cancer center's "Graduation in Radiation" program. When patients come out of the linear accelerator room after their last treatment, they go through a finish line where staff and families blow bubbles and celebrate with music and hats.

Since forming the Patient Advisory Committee, Southwest Cancer Center has hosted four annual survivor celebrations.

The cancer center also celebrates its patients' birthdays. If patients are in treatment during their birthday, the cancer center hosts a party for them. Other patients receive birthday cards in the mail signed by cancer center staff.

Celebrate Today

Another big initiative that the Patient Advisory Committee developed is the cancer center's Celebrate Today Fund. This fund helps patients pay for items that are not covered by insurers, including wigs, gas vouchers, lymphedema sleeves, nutritional products, and more. To raise funds, committee members initially hosted a benefit concert in November 2009. In August 2012 the Patient Advisory Committee also hosted a bicycle ride called "Cycle for Hope." Next, the committee partnered with nationally renowned artist Lynn Haney to create a Santa Claus ornament, *Sharing the Gifts*. The ornament was available for purchase online and in retail stores with a portion of the profits going back to the Celebrate Today Fund.

Hope Lane

One of the most profound and long-lasting changes spearheaded by the Patient Advisory Committee was a street name change.

The cancer center originally was located on Southwest Cancer Center Drive. The feedback the cancer center received from committee members was profound—every time they drove down SW Cancer Center Drive, the street name was a continual reminder that they have cancer. As cancer patients and cancer survivors, they wanted the street name changed to something that would instill hope. Today, Southwest Cancer Center now resides on Hope Lane.

Because the process of getting the street name changed was not simple—it involved much paperwork and many hoops to go through—Southwest Cancer Center made an event of the street name change. All of its patients and the local media



were informed of the initiative, which resulted in a story in the local paper about the re-naming of the street.

Other areas where the Patient Advisory Committee provided valuable contributions include:

- The development of the cancer center's patient information video
- Changes to the cancer center's patient satisfaction questionnaire
- The creation of a dedicated parking lot for cancer patients.

All of these efforts have significantly increased the cancer center's patient satisfaction scores. Prior to the implementation of the Patient Advisory Committee, Southwest Cancer Center's Press Ganey scores were in the 50th percentile; today the cancer center is in the 97th percentile in patient satisfaction.

The Score Team

In tandem with its Patient Advisory Committee, Southwest Cancer Center also solicits employee feedback through its Score Team. The team was established in 2005 to help solidify internal teamwork at the cancer center. The second purpose: to improve the cancer center's employee satisfaction scores. The cancer center wanted to create a culture of "open communication" with managers listening to staff without prejudice and repercussions. The process wasn't always smooth. As all managers know, it is easy to listen when everything is going well; the situation is more challenging when issues arise and changes need to be made.

The Score Team is comprised of volunteer employees throughout the cancer center—ranging from top performers to more middle-of-the-road performers and with representatives from all departments.

Here's how the process works. A Score Team chairperson meets monthly with the entire Score Team. They talk about any topics that are of concern to the cancer center, for example, patient satisfaction scores. They also discuss operational issues and any morale issues that may have been raised by staff.

Data from Press Ganey clearly showed the Southwest Cancer Center could improve its employee satisfaction scores and also revealed areas where improvement could be made. For example, one of the areas the cancer center needed to improve in was management communication. The Score Team used this information to identify concrete ideas for improvement. Here are a few of the strategies that the Score Team implemented:

- **Weekly one-on-one meetings.** Managers meet with all of their current employees for 30 minutes each week. These meetings provide an opportunity for the staff member to discuss issues with their managers. Topics range from processes that are

not working to challenges with a co-worker. The cancer center has found these meetings to be a solid way of forming a relationship with its front line staff.

- **Quarterly skip-level meetings.** Based on staff feedback, the cancer center implemented these quarterly meetings in which [the cancer program administrator?] meets with each staff member without their managers present. Similar to the one-on-one meetings, the employee chooses the topic(s). When first implemented, managers and even staff were hesitant about participating in the skip-level meetings. Managers were concerned that the meetings would be all about what they were doing wrong; employees were concerned about how much to share with upper management. Eventually the process was accepted, and staff began to share constructive feedback and ideas.
- **Monthly Oncology Warrior.** Southwest Cancer Center staff wanted a concrete way to reward outstanding service. So, each month management and staff come together to pick an Oncology Warrior. There must be an underlying justification for the nomination, and everyone votes. The prize is not big (free movie tickets), but it's a badge of honor.
- **Staff- and patient-centered activities.** To improve staff satisfaction scores, the Score Team recognized that it needed to improve staff morale. Today employees at Southwest Cancer Center participate in a number of activities, including annual hot air balloon rides where staff and patients ride together. Staff recently held a few activities around football tailgating. Everyone that participated, including staff from radiation, chemo, and the front office, had a fun time, and the Score Team looks forward to planning future events.

The Score Team has also helped implement initiatives such as the bereavement program, which helps staff to attend the funeral of a patient they were close to or who they had cared for. When possible, another staff member will step in and cover the employee's responsibilities during the time he or she attends the patient's funeral.

Cancer center staff also fundraises for patients by selling burritos. Staff donates supplies and their time, and any money raised is put towards the Celebrate Today Fund discussed earlier.

When the Score Team was first implemented in 2006, Southwest Cancer Center's employee satisfaction scores were in the 83rd percentile. By 2009 the staff turnover rate was around 27 percent. The cancer center has seen significant improvement in both scores. Today, its employee satisfaction scores are in the 95th percentile and staff turnover rate is down to 7.7 percent. For Southwest Cancer Center, the lesson was simple: it pays to listen to patients and employees.

—Ernie Elemento, PT, MBA, is administrator and Vasia Craddick, RNC, BSN, is director of Clinical Operations at Southwest Cancer Center, Lubbock, Tex.