

Building a Multidisciplinary Consortium in Iowa to Advance Genetic Counseling and Testing in Patients with Cancer

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BACKGROUND

As cancer clinicians develop increasingly complex treatment plans, the results from somatic and/or germline tests are guiding personalized treatment decisions. Many patients with cancer do not get optimal genetic counseling/testing when indicated. To ensure that cancer clinicians are following the latest clinical recommendations around genetic counseling/testing, the Iowa Oncology Society (IOS), working in collaboration with the Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC), developed a multiphase initiative to inform quality improvement (QI) opportunities.

METHODS

In 2021, IOS launched a multidisciplinary consortium to advance genetic counseling and testing in oncology. Engaging a diverse group of stakeholders, IOS held a focus group to explore the current landscape, conducted three educational lunch and learn sessions, produced a podcast, and hosted a working group meeting. These meetings and activities were designed to explore ways to overcome common barriers in care delivery and identify effective practices to coordinate cancer genetic counseling and testing in clinical practice.



Consortium Members



CONCLUSION

- Engage stakeholders and lead interdisciplinary efforts to improve genetic counseling and testing in patients with cancer.
- Use consistent language to reduce confusion about somatic vs. germline testing.
- Support the “Access to Genetic Counselor Services Act” to update Medicare law and improve access to genetic counselors for Medicare beneficiaries. #AccestoGCs

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RESULTS

Through this initiative, IOS identified several key improvement opportunities for cancer clinicians treating patients in Iowa. Since 43 percent of Iowa’s population is rural, this initiative also identified practical strategies for oncology practices in low-resource areas.

The following insights and suggestions were generated from this initiative:

1. Cancer programs may implement creative ways to collect patient history and screen patients for hereditary cancer syndromes.
2. Clinicians may use more effective education materials when referring patients for genetic counseling.
3. Clinicians may clarify language/communication to reduce confusion about somatic vs. germline test results.
4. Cancer programs may form partnerships with local genetic counselors and/or organizations that offer telehealth services.

IOS summarized these ideas and disseminated education and resources to guide cancer clinicians in assessing and improving their own practices.

CONCLUSION

This multiphase initiative represents a framework for a state oncology society to engage other stakeholders and lead interdisciplinary efforts to improve care for patients with cancer. As the landscape of genetic counseling evolves, IOS supports legislative efforts aimed at having Medicare recognize certified genetic counselors (CGCs) as healthcare providers. IOS plans to build on this initial work to advance cancer genetic counseling and testing throughout the state by developing additional programming through 2022.

acc-cancer.org/iowa-genetic-counseling

