

Patient Navigator Program Overview

DRA Project Report 07-02

Patient navigation programs provide a very promising approach to reducing disparities for cancer and other high disparity diseases. It is a part of the consumer-navigation priority area for the DRA Project. The Patient Navigator Program report provides an overview of a few of the more than 200 patient navigation programs as well as existing toolkits for patient navigators. Most of these programs focus on reducing disparities in cancer outcomes and have shown impressive results. The navigation concept has also spread to demonstration projects in preventative health. Among these programs there is a wide amount of variability around the types of navigators used, the method of outreach, the services provided and the communities they serve.

Patient navigators help patients and their families navigate the fragmented maze of doctors' offices, clinics, hospitals, out-patient centers, payment systems, support organizations and other components of the healthcare system. Services provided by patient navigators vary by program and the needs of the patient, but often include:

- Facilitating communication among patients, family members, survivors and healthcare providers.
- Coordinating care among providers.
- Arranging financial support, transportation, and childcare and assisting with paperwork.
- Ensuring that appropriate medical records are available at medical appointments.
- Facilitating follow-up appointments.
- Community outreach and building partnership with local agencies and groups.
- Ensuring access to clinical trials.

There is no one common definition of patient navigators and the profile of a patient navigator varies widely by program. Many use trained community health workers who may be full-time employees or volunteers. Community health workers have close ties to the local community and serve as important links between underserved communities and the healthcare system. They also possess the linguistic and cultural skills needed to connect with patients from underserved communities. Healthcare navigators include trained social workers, nurses and nurse practitioners as well as trained lay persons/volunteers. Some navigation programs also use a team based approach that combines community health workers with one or more professionals with experience in healthcare or social work.

The adoption and use of patient navigation programs are showing significant momentum, but more evidence is needed for widespread adoption. The Harlem Cancer Education and Demonstration Project was the first indication of the promise of patient navigation in improving outcomes for underserved patients. Other community based patient navigation projects have expanded on this evidence base. However, the lack of a clear definition for patient navigators and patient navigator services has made it difficult to aggregate data across programs and establish best practices. To keep the momentum for patient navigation more rigorous studies are needed of the patient navigation role as well as program costs and benefits. Fortunately, a number of these rigorous studies are underway through projects such as the Cancer Health Disparities Patient Navigator Research Program and the Medicare Cancer Prevention and Treatment Demonstration for Racial and Ethnic Minorities.

Review the full report at: <http://www.altfutures.com/dra/Patient%20Navigator%20Overview.pdf>.
For more information on the DRA Project, visit our website at www.altfutures.com/draproject.

"The challenge is not only to anticipate the future, but to create it."

The DRA Project - Institute for Alternative Futures

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