

## **LESSON SECTION I**

Patient navigation has been shown to enhance patient satisfaction, improve care coordination, and elevate the overall quality of life for patients.

A recent systematic review of 61 studies consolidated the evidence for cancer patient navigation. According to rigorous evaluation criteria, the authors found strong evidence that patient navigation significantly boosts patient satisfaction and quality of life.

The allegory of the orchard illustrates how certain populations experience health disparities due to historically biased policies in the United States. To address and reverse these disparities, we need evidence-based strategies such as patient navigation. When applied effectively to specific populations facing these disparities, patient navigation can help reduce health inequities by increasing screening rates and facilitating earlier cancer detection.

So far, we have discussed how patient navigation can support patients and populations who have been historically disadvantaged. Additionally, patient navigation assists healthcare providers in delivering better care and helps healthcare systems enhance the overall quality of care that they deliver. This often results in financial benefits for the healthcare system. Let's delve into how this works.

Firstly, patient navigation enhances the quality of care that healthcare providers can offer their patients.

In cancer care, patient navigation has been shown to increase the uptake of screenings for breast, cervical, colorectal, and lung cancers, and reduce the time from screening to diagnosis, and from diagnosis to treatment.

Tailoring patient navigation to meet individual and population-specific needs yields the best results.

Now for some real-world examples. A National Cancer Institute-funded study, called the ACCURE Trial, was able to completely eliminate lung and breast cancer treatment disparities. ACCURE stands for Accountability for Cancer Care through Undoing Racism and Equity. ACCURE investigators accomplished this by including a real-time alert system to let them know when a patient was not completing a critical milestone on time. They paired that technology with a nurse navigation intervention to help patients get back on track.

From diagnosis through treatment, patients had the same navigator the entire time which helped to build trust and rapport. The nurse navigators reached out to patients within the first month of diagnosis, then scheduled monthly progress assessments, mostly over the phone. Navigators followed up with patients until they confirmed adherence to the next milestone. When milestones were missed, the registry system generated an alert to the navigator who then either interacted directly with the patient to address the issue or advocated on the patient's behalf with the clinical team to reach the milestone.

Other benefits of patient navigation for healthcare systems include:

- Fewer unplanned hospital admissions and readmissions

- Reduced length of hospital stay
- Reduced ER visits
- Reduced missed appointments
- Improved patient retention
- Reduced outmigration and loss to follow up
- Increased market competitiveness
- Increased downstream revenue as a result of patient retention in the system and referral to other services within the same healthcare system

Here is another case example.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham received a 2012 CMS Innovation award to implement a patient navigation program called Patient Care Connect, across 12 cancer centers in the southeastern United States. Patient Care Connect focused on improving the triple aim of enhancing the patient experience of care, improving population health, and reducing the per capita cost of health care. This program employed patient navigators, not nurse navigators or social workers. These patient navigators supported more than 10,000 patients with cancer from diagnosis through survivorship and end-of-life care over 3 years. The navigators performed routine screening to identify patient barriers to care and helped patients actively participate in their health care to overcome these barriers.

As a result, 92% of patient concerns were addressed. 90% of patients stated that they would recommend the program to another cancer survivor.

The percentage of Emergency Department visits, hospitalizations, and intensive care unit admissions declined for all patients, but they declined by 6.0%, 7.9%, and 10.6% more per quarter, for patients in the Patient Care Connect program compared to those receiving usual care without tailored support.

What did this mean in financial terms? The Patient Care Connect program saved \$781.29 per quarter per patient in the program, resulting in an estimated 10:1 return on investment to the institution.

If that were not persuasive enough, navigation is an expected standard of care and accreditation requirement for several important oncology accreditation and standard setting bodies like the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer. To become accredited by the Commission on Cancer, cancer programs must undergo a rigorous evaluation and review of its performance to demonstrate compliance with the CoC standards.

The National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NAPBC) states that Navigation services must be provided by qualified navigation professionals, including Clinical Navigators and Patient Navigators, who have documented training and education in providing individualized assistance to patients with breast disease or breast cancer, their families, and their caregivers.

Having a patient navigation program meets several of the standards of the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers.

Patient navigation, as part of a comprehensive strategy to address health disparities in the U.S., also makes economic sense for the country.

In 2018, health disparities in the U.S. cost the nation approximately \$193 billion. Premature deaths resulting from preventable health disparities, including cancer and other chronic diseases, weaken the nation's economic productivity and impact the sustainability of programs like Social Security.

A 2009 report revealed that the U.S. was facing increasing chronic morbidity, significantly weakening the workforce needed to meet national security physical health requirements. While addressing this issue requires multiple interventions, patient navigation can be one part of the solution.

This marks the end of this lesson: The Value of Patient Navigation. In this lesson, you learned to:

- Describe the value of patient navigation to patients, populations, healthcare providers, and health systems
- Describe the value of patient navigation in moral, performance, and economic terms

Thank you for participating in this lesson, and for your commitment to enhancing patient care through effective navigation.