

Challenges and Practical Tips for Advance Care Planning and End-of-Life Communications With Cancer Patients in Global Pandemic

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Abstract : Background: The diagnosis of a serious illness like cancer can have an impact on a patient's emotional well-being and may result in psychological symptoms, anxiety, depression, and loss of control. Advance care planning discussions ensure patients' values and goals of care, including patients' freedom to choose their place of death, are respected. Unfortunately, these discussions are often delayed and are not initiated early in patients' cancer trajectory. As a result, patients' wishes often remains unknown until the last phase of their life. Evidence suggests that many patients inappropriately receive aggressive treatment near the end of life, which does lead to higher resource utilization, decreased quality of life, and increased cost. Additionally, the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic challenged the health care systems worldwide and raised important ethical issues, especially regarding the potential need for rationing health care in the context of scarce resources and crisis capacity. The importance of goal concordant care is now even substantially important and is heightened in the context of this pandemic. Problem: Although there is growing evidence on the effects of the ACP on the completion of advanced directives, improved patient and family concordance for preferences for medical care, and receipt of care, there is still a lack of standardized ACP conversation strategies for patients with cancer. Methods: The Key concepts of ACP include (1) assessing patient and family readiness, (2) identifying a surrogate decision maker (medical power of attorney), (3) exploring patient and family understanding of the disease and treatment options,(4) discussing the values and goals of care, and options for end-of-life care, (5) documenting patient preferences in the medical record, and (6) revisiting the discussions at every change in the treatment plan and /or change in clinical status, including at every hospitalization. Conclusion/Implication for practice: Advance Care Planning (ACP) and end-of-life (EOL) discussions are important for patients, families, and health care providers. Adopting the verbal and nonverbal communication strategies can help overcome the barriers to effective communication on these difficult discussions. ACP with goals of care discussions should not be delayed until the patient is hospitalized.

Keywords : advance care planning, end of life, cancer, global, pandemic

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