Care Coordinators serve as the patient’s main point of contact across the care continuum for both new and existing patients. They are the missing piece, especially in oncology, for helping to track patients so they have less fragmented care.

Smilow’s Patient Navigator Program Walks with Patients, Every Step of the Way

When Tom Felton was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer, it was an overwhelming conversation with his oncologist, recalls his wife Sharon. Two years and four surgeries later, the cancer has metastasized, but he’s still in great spirits and is laughing in the background recalling his experience while his wife talks on the phone.

“My husband has had so many odd things that have happened to him that we kid Ginny she should write a book,” said Mrs. Felton.

Ginny is Virginia Clinchy-Jarmoszko, one of seven Care Coordinators across the Smilow Cancer Hospital Network who support Medicare patients undergoing treatment for cancer. Care Coordinators are one of the strategies Smilow has employed to improve services to patients in the Oncology Care Model (OCM), a value-based payment program launched and funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Innovation Center. Care Coordinators proactively follow up with high-risk cancer patients to track symptoms and intervene early to prevent hospitalizations and emergency department visits. They also support care transitions from inpatient to outpatient settings, and to hospice when necessary.

Smilow Cancer Hospital was selected as one of 176 practices to pilot the program, which began in July 2016 and will run through June 2021. So far, it has worked: there has been a 21.1 percent decrease in the hospitalization rate and 8.4 percent decrease in emergency department visits, according to Naralys Estevez Sinanis, OCM Program Manager at Smilow.

“Care Coordinators serve as the patient’s main point of contact across the care continuum for both new and existing patients,” said Ms. Sinanis.

“They are the missing piece, especially in oncology, for helping to track patients so they have less fragmented care.”

Like all seven Care Coordinators, Ms. Clinchy-Jarmoszko is a registered nurse. She also has a background in critical and ICU care, and case management. “Just hearing the word ‘cancer,’” she said of her patients, “they don’t know where to begin.”

While Ms. Clinchy-Jarmoszko reviews background information provided to her about her patients, she believes in asking questions when they first meet. She aims to learn what her patients understand about their cancer, their treatment, their options. She also tries to clarify important details in how they wish to manage their care, like their living situation and who will support them throughout their treatment.

After that initial consultation, she likes to keep in touch with patients at least once a week with phone calls, or by visiting when they have an appointment or treatment scheduled. Ms. Clinchy-Jarmoszko said she tries to “be a cheerleader to help her patients through, especially with symptom management, so they can withstand their treatment.”

Along with coordinating with each patient’s medical and oncology teams, she often brings in a nutritionist, a social worker, and other supportive care services to ensure the care team is all on the same page.

Care Coordinators also work with patients to take advantage of the Smilow Extended Care Center, which is another part of the OCM strategy. Instead of waiting until symptoms such as dehydration and nausea are so dire that emergency intervention is needed, Ms. Clinchy-Jarmoszko’s goal is to keep an open line of communication so patients reach out early. She keeps patients aware of alternative solutions, like outpatient urgent care.

When cancer is not curable, Ms. Clinchy-Jarmoszko emphasizes to each of her patients that they are in control of their care and treatment. “I want to be sure that every patient, and their family, understands that there are choices along the way,” she said. So far, “each patient has passed in the manner in which they wanted to.”

“She really is remarkable,” Mrs. Felton added of Clinchy-Jarmoszko. “She’s just so comforting and professional. We’re just blessed to have her.”