

Healthcare News and Tips

October 15th, 2024

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month—a time dedicated to raising awareness, providing education, and supporting those affected by breast cancer. While most of the focus is placed on early detection and treatment, one often overlooked aspect is the importance of clear communication between cancer patients and their providers.

Recently, a breast cancer patient shared with me that she was frustrated with her care team, especially her oncologist, saying "I don't feel like my doctor is listening to me." My colleagues and I at Guardian Nurses hear this, unfortunately, much too often. Feeling heard is essential for emotional well-being and trust, and that is critically important when you're a patient. When patients feel listened to, they are more likely to share concerns openly, fostering better understanding and connection. In any relationship, not just between provider and patient, being heard validates experiences, builds empathy, and strengthens communication, leading to more positive and collaborative outcomes.

Sometimes, though, you have to take matters into your own hands. This month's issue of *The Flame*, shares some strategies that you can use to enhance your communication with your cancer team.



Why Clear Communication Matters

When you're diagnosed with cancer, your world can feel like it's turned upside down. Suddenly, you're bombarded with complex medical terms, life-altering decisions, and the emotional weight of your diagnosis. In such a scenario, clear communication from your healthcare providers becomes a lifeline. It's not just about understanding your treatment options, but also about feeling heard, validated, and respected.

Unfortunately, many cancer patients report experiences of confusion and frustration when it comes to provider-patient communication. Whether it's due to rushed appointments, medical jargon, or a lack of empathy, these barriers can hinder your ability to make informed decisions about your health.

Quite simply, clear communication helps:

1. **Reduce Anxiety:** Cancer is emotionally taxing, and not understanding what's happening only increases that burden. When doctors explain treatments and diagnoses in plain language, it helps alleviate some of that stress.
2. **Improve Decision-Making:** Informed decisions are empowered decisions. If you're fully aware of the risks, benefits, and alternatives of your treatment, you're better equipped to make choices that align with your values and goals.

Use
Your
Voice.

Betty
Betty Long



President/CEO



Congratulations, Rose and Joe Veneziale!

This year, thanks to Nightingale Awards of Pennsylvania founder, Jayne Felgen, nurses were able to nominate someone in their life who, through their belief in them, their encouragement and support, had an immeasurable impact in their career and their lives.

Our very own Heather Munizza, MSN, RN, nominated [Joe and Rose Veneziale](#), her dear friends in the [above photo](#), for their generous and compassionate hearts. Owners

3. **Strengthen Trust:** When healthcare providers listen and respond to your concerns, trust is built. This trust is critical in ensuring that you feel confident in your care team, which can positively influence your overall treatment experience.

Common Communication Barriers in Cancer Care

Unfortunately, cancer patients frequently encounter communication gaps with their clinical teams. Here are some common challenges:

- **Medical Jargon:** Providers may explain diagnoses and treatments using complex language that is difficult for patients to understand. This can leave you feeling confused and unsure about your options.
- **Rushed Consultations:** Oncologists often have tight schedules, and appointments may feel rushed, leaving little time for questions. As a result, important concerns may go unaddressed.
- **Lack of Empathy:** Believe me, not all providers are adept at delivering difficult news with compassion. Some patients report feeling dismissed or unheard when voicing their fears or concerns.
- **Fragmented Care:** Many cancer patients see multiple specialists. When communication between providers is lacking, it can lead to conflicting advice, adding to the confusion. Don't assume that your providers are talking to one another.

How to Advocate for Clearer Communication

While the burden of clear communication shouldn't rest entirely on you, there are strategies you can use to advocate for yourself during your cancer journey.

1. **Prepare for Appointments:** Before your visit, write down a list of questions or concerns you want to address. This can help ensure you don't forget anything important during the appointment, especially if emotions are running high.
2. **Ask for Clarification:** If something isn't clear, don't hesitate to ask your provider to explain it in simpler terms. It's their job to make sure you understand your treatment plan. Don't be afraid to ask, "Can you explain that in a way that's easier to understand?"
3. **Bring a Support Person:** Having a trusted friend or family member with you can be invaluable. They can take notes, ask questions you might not think of, and offer emotional support during the appointment.
4. **Request Written Materials:** After discussing complex medical information, ask for written summaries or handouts that you can review at home.
5. **Use Patient Portals:** Many healthcare systems offer online portals where you can review test results, send questions to your doctor, or access educational materials. These can be great tools to help stay informed and clarify any misunderstandings after your appointment.
6. **Second Opinions:** If you're unsure about your diagnosis or treatment plan, don't hesitate to seek a second opinion. Our team at Guardian Nurses highly recommends this strategy. A fresh perspective can sometimes provide clarity and peace of mind.

The Role of Empathy in Patient-Centered Care

It's not just about what is communicated, but **how** it's communicated. Compassion and empathy from healthcare providers are vital. In cancer care, where the stakes are so high, feeling emotionally supported can make a world of difference.

It's simple---when you feel heard, you're more likely to engage in your treatment plan, follow through on recommendations, and maintain a sense of hope. That's why it's important to seek out healthcare providers (doctors or nurse practitioners) who not only have the technical expertise but also understand the human side of medicine.

[of Giggles Gifts](#) in Northeast Philly, Rose and Joe offered Heather a job and a place to stay and gave her the confidence to pursue nursing school. The rest, as they say, is history!

They will be honored at the upcoming Nightingale Gala on October 25th as the first recipients of the Felgen Legacy Impact Award! Kudos to all.

If you're a cancer patient or supporting someone through their journey, remember that you have the right to understand your care. Advocate for clear communication, ask questions, and seek out providers who prioritize your voice in the conversation. Empowered patients are better equipped to face the challenges ahead, and your voice is a powerful tool in your cancer journey.

Lighting your way
through the
healthcare maze!

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