



# ALLIANCE TO ADVANCE PATIENT-CENTERED CANCER CARE

*Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center*

**An estimated 1.7 MILLION PEOPLE** are newly diagnosed with cancer each year in the United States, and the number is projected to grow as the population ages.<sup>1</sup>

Despite advances in cancer diagnosis and treatment, access to high-quality cancer care continues to be challenging for some patients in the United States, especially those in vulnerable and underserved communities.

In response to this unmet need, the [Merck Foundation](#) (the Foundation) established the [Alliance to Advance Patient-Centered Cancer Care](#) (the Alliance) in 2017. The Alliance is a multi-site initiative that aims to increase timely access to patient-centered care and reduce disparities in cancer care for vulnerable and underserved populations in the United States.

## OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER, COLUMBUS

### Addressing Cancer Care Symptoms and Needs of Patients in Central and Appalachian Ohio

As a member of the Alliance, The [Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center](#) (OSUCCC) will work with its patients, families and community partners to monitor and address cancer patients' symptoms and needs in a timely fashion – before problems intensify and greatly affect treatment adherence and outcomes.

Community partners, the [Heart of Ohio Family Health Centers](#), [Primary One Health Centers](#) and the [American Cancer Society](#), will provide access to supportive services for underserved patients and their families. Community partners will also work with OSUCCC to help ensure timely referral and treatment for newly diagnosed cancer patients.

The OSUCCC program will implement a smart phone-based program to monitor patients' symptoms and needs during treatment. In addition, trained patient navigators will support and guide patients through the cancer care and treatment process.

### Focusing on Underserved Communities

The OSUCCC serves the whole state of Ohio, but primarily Central Ohio and the Appalachian counties. Fourteen percent of the Ohio population belongs to historically underserved racial and ethnic minority groups. One-third of the African-American and Hispanic populations are defined as low-income. In addition, African-American, Appalachian, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanic women in the state experience a higher rate of poverty than non-Hispanic White women and men.

Among newly diagnosed cancer patients in Ohio, approximately half are female and one-third live in rural areas with more limited access to treatment facilities and supportive care services. Ohio patients also experience a higher mortality rate from breast, colorectal, endometrial and ovarian cancers than the national average.<sup>3</sup> This disparity is often due to patients being diagnosed at later cancer stages or to delays in cancer treatment.



**Patient-centered care:** Providing care that is respectful of and responsive to individual patient preferences, needs and values, and ensures that patient values guide all clinical decisions.<sup>2</sup>

## Increasing Access to High-Quality Cancer Care

### *Our Intervention Approach*

#### ***Develop and refine an integrated communication system for newly diagnosed cancer patients and their health care providers***

- Ensure patients have a smart phone with Internet and texting capabilities to communicate with their health care providers, receive text reminders and report symptoms
- Train physicians and relevant clinic staff on how to deliver culturally appropriate, patient-centered communication

#### ***Systematically monitor patients' physical and emotional symptoms***

- Use the text messaging feature on patients' cell phones to monitor and evaluate patients' reports of symptoms and other needs on a monthly basis

- Provide appropriate follow-up by the health care team and patient navigators, including referral to supportive services as needed
- Establish close collaboration between the clinical staff and navigator to address patients' symptoms, needs and treatment barriers

#### ***Support patient adherence with treatment and supportive care visits***

- Use text messages and email reminders to help patients follow treatment plans, make appointments and access supportive care services
- Ensure all patients can access navigation services, particularly those who have missed clinic appointments, to assist them with treatment adherence

## Advancing Best Practices in Patient-Centered Cancer Care

OSUCCC plans to evaluate the effectiveness of its program in improving the delivery of cancer care and symptom management to newly diagnosed patients undergoing cancer treatment, particularly the vulnerable and underserved populations in Ohio. In addition, the Alliance will create a learning collaborative among program partners to share insights from the programs and help identify and promote best practices in patient-centered cancer care that can improve patient outcomes and reduce disparities in care.

#### **Program Co-Directors:**

##### **Michelle J. Naughton, Ph.D., M.P.H.**

Professor, Division of Cancer Prevention & Control  
Department of Internal Medicine  
College of Medicine  
The Ohio State University  
Email: [Michelle.Naughton@osumc.edu](mailto:Michelle.Naughton@osumc.edu)

##### **Electra D. Paskett, Ph.D.**

Marion N. Rowley Professor of Cancer Research  
Director, Division of Cancer Prevention & Control  
Department of Internal Medicine  
College of Medicine  
The Ohio State University  
Email: [Electra.Paskett@osumc.edu](mailto:Electra.Paskett@osumc.edu)

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