BRIEF COMMUNICATION

Introducing NEW Patient Symptom Management Guides

by Stephanie Burlein-Hall and Tamara Harth

As oncology nurses, helping patients understand the cause of cancer-related symptoms and how to manage them is an essential part of our role. Symptom management crosses all cancer sites, stages of disease, and the various treatment modalities. CANO's third practice standard for the specialized oncology nurse, Management of Cancer Symptoms and Treatment Side Effects, states:

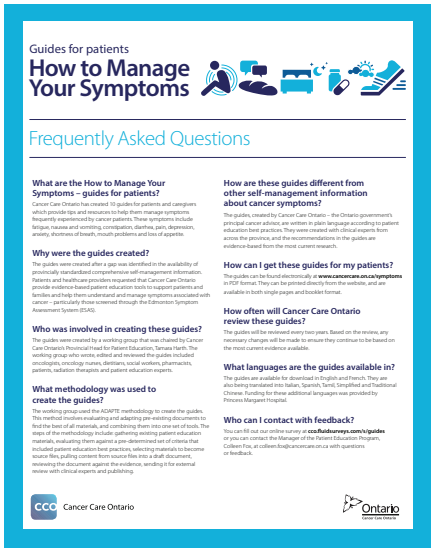
> *The specialized oncology nurse integrates and applies knowledge of cancer pathophysiology, disease progression, treatment modalities, treatment side-effects and complications, and symptom problems to assess, plan, implement and evaluate the outcomes of best practice/evidence-based care and other clinical interventions (Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology, 2006).*

One of the competencies associated with this standard reinforces the use of patient education principles to help patients and their family members understand how to manage symptoms and treatment-related side effects when they occur.

While the availability of clinician-focused, evidence-based tools for the assessment and intervention of symptoms currently exists through tools like CoStars (The Ottawa Hospital, 2016) and Cancer Care Ontario's symptom management guides (CCO, 2016), to date no evidence-based patient education resources have been widely available to clinicians.

Recently, Cancer Care Ontario launched a series of symptom management guides for patients that incorporates evidence-based information that is easy to read and links seven symptoms (pain, fatigue, appetite, nausea/vomiting, dyspnea, anxiety and depression) identified on the Edmonton Symptom Assessment System (ESAS). In Ontario, all patients receiving cancer care through the regional cancer centres and associated partner sites, complete a symptom screen using the standardized ESAS tool at frequent intervals during their cancer care journey. Additional patient guides for symptoms like constipation, diarrhea and mouth care were also developed.

The How to Manage Your Symptoms – guides for patients were created by Cancer Care Ontario and a working group of clinicians and patient education leads after a gap was identified in the availability of provincially standardized comprehensive self-management information. They were developed using a rigorous methodology that included evaluating and adapting pre-existing documents to find the best of all materials, and combining them into one set of tools. (See Figure 1.)


Guides for patients

How to Manage Your Symptoms

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the How to Manage Your Symptoms – guides for patients?

Cancer Care Ontario has created 10 guides for patients and caregivers which provide tips and resources to help them manage symptoms frequently experienced by cancer patients. These symptoms include fatigue, nausea and vomiting, constipation, diarrhea, pain, depression, anxiety, shortness of breath, mouth problems and loss of appetite.

Why were the guides created?

The guides were created after a gap was identified in the availability of provincially standardized comprehensive self-management information. Patients and healthcare providers requested that Cancer Care Ontario provide evidence-based patient education tools to support patients and families and help them understand and manage symptoms associated with cancer – particularly those screened through the Edmonton Symptom Assessment System (ESAS).

Who was involved in creating these guides?

The guides were created by a working group that was chaired by Cancer Care Ontario's Provincial Head for Patient Education, Tamara Harth. The working group who wrote, edited and reviewed the guides included oncologists, oncology nurses, dietitians, social workers, pharmacists, patients, radiation therapists and patient education experts.

What methodology was used to create the guides?

The working group used the ADAPTE methodology to create the guides. This method involves evaluating and adapting pre-existing documents to find the best of all materials, and combining them into one set of tools. The steps of the methodology include: gathering existing patient education materials, evaluating them against a pre-determined set of criteria that included patient education best practices, selecting materials to become source files, pulling content from source files into a draft document, reviewing the document against the evidence, sending it for external review with clinical experts and publishing.

How are these guides different from other self-management information about cancer symptoms?

The guides, created by Cancer Care Ontario – the Ontario government's principal cancer advisor, are written in plain language according to patient education best practices. They were created with clinical experts from across the province, and the recommendations in the guides are evidence-based from the most current research.

How can I get these guides for my patients?

The guides can be found electronically at www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms in PDF format. They can be printed directly from the website, and are available in both single-pages and booklet format.

How often will Cancer Care Ontario review these guides?

The guides will be reviewed every two years. Based on the review, any necessary changes will be made to ensure they continue to be based on the most current evidence available.

What languages are the guides available in?

The guides are available for download in English and French. They are also being translated into Italian, Spanish, Tamil, Simplified and Traditional Chinese. Funding for these additional languages was provided by Princess Margaret Hospital.

Who can I contact with feedback?

You can fill out our online survey at **cco.fluidsurveys.com/s/guides** or you can contact the Manager of the Patient Education Program, Colleen Fox, at colleen.fox@cancercare.on.ca with questions or feedback.

Cancer Care Ontario

Ontario

Figure 1.

Oncology nurses are encouraged to use these guides in their practice and to share this information with nursing colleagues and other members of the inter-professional team.

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