

# MAINE COALITION TO FIGHT PROSTATE CANCER

## SPRING NEWSLETTER

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### The Role of a Nurse Navigator

Andrea Martelle, RN, OCN, ONN-CG, is a Genitourinary Nurse Navigator working at Maine General, Harold Alfond Cancer Care Center in Augusta. She has contributed to this article about the role of navigators.

The role of the nurse navigator has evolved since the first navigation program was established in Harlem, New York, in 1990. Currently, nurse navigators are predominately utilized in the oncology setting, but we see the role expand into other specialties as the benefits of a navigation program are appreciated.

Navigation is a process that gives each patient personal and individualized support throughout their journey with cancer. The navigator's role begins with a community understanding of the need for cancer screening and continues through diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and end of life (Shockney, 2016). The fundamental purpose of nurse navigation is to guide patients and their caregivers to make informed decisions through a complex medical system throughout their cancer journey. Nurse navigators also identify and eliminate any barriers to high quality and timely care and assure care is delivered close to home whenever possible. Additional roles include incorporating education, shared treatment decision making, as well as psychosocial support for the patient and family. Each patient is also screened for additional barriers to care, such as lack of transportation, inadequate insurance coverage, spiritual or religious concerns, food disparities, lack of psychosocial support, etc. Upon identifying any barrier to care, the nurse navigator collaborates with other disciplines that are a part of the multidisciplinary health care team to work to improve or eliminate individual barriers to care. The most common barrier identified is either a lack of transportation or the inability to afford gas to travel to oncology treatments. Each cancer program has access to financial grants or community programs to support patients and provide access to care. Some of these programs, including the Andruzzi Foundation, are income-based, where others such as the American Cancer Society's Road to Recovery Program are available to anyone with a cancer diagnosis.

Overall, nurse navigators ensure care coordination while advocating for each patient under their care. Nurse navigators have a good understanding of our complex health systems and retain access to back doors and loopholes to facilitate timely workup and care.

According to Lillie Shockney, RN, BS, MAS, one of the founders of the Academy of Oncology Nurse and Patient Navigators (AONN+), seventy-five percent of oncology nurse navigators come from the oncology nursing setting and have fifteen years or more of oncology nursing experience (Shockney, 2016). This extensive training gives confidence to the valuable contribution nurse navigators bring to the multidisciplinary team. Additionally, it is preferred that nurse navigators hold a BSN or national certification, such as OCN (Oncology Certified Nurse) or ONN-CG (Oncology Nurse Navigation Generalist), to show their commitment to the role.

There are several models of patient navigation. Some models are based on tumor or cancer type, while others are based on the entry point system or are physician-based, where a nurse navigator works specifically with a physician and all patients in his/her practice. Some health care facilities use a variety of models depending on the size of the

institution and the number of analytical cancer cases. Oncology nurse navigation programs have been shown to enhance coordination of care and patient satisfaction by decreasing the number of days from diagnosis to first provider visit and treatment (Gordils-Perez, Schneider, Gabel, & Trotter, 2017). For a list of nurse navigators within the Maine Health Cancer Care Network, visit <https://mainehealth.org/cancer/cancer-supportresources/cancer-patient-navigators> . If you or a loved one is not a patient at a Maine Health Care Cancer facility, please contact your health care provider (physician, hospital, or cancer resource center) to find a navigator in your area.

## Sage words from Alex Trebek one-year survivor of stage 4 pancreatic cancer.

Mr. Trebek's words are inspirational for all cancer patients. He noted that he would be lying if, "I said the journey has been an easy one. There were some good days and a lot of not so good days... there were moments of great pain, days when certain bodily functions no longer functioned, and sudden, massive attacks of great depression that made me wonder if it really was worth fighting on. But I brushed that aside quickly because that would have been a massive betrayal, a betrayal of my wife and soulmate, Jean, who has given her all to help me survive. It would have been a betrayal of other cancer patients who have looked to me as an inspiration and a cheerleader of sorts, of the value of living and hope, and it would certainly have been a betrayal of my faith in God and the millions of prayers that have been said on my behalf....if we take it just one day at a time, with a positive attitude, anything is possible." These words speak for all cancer patients. Each cancer survivor is a role model and cheerleader for the next cancer patient, for family members, friends, and the public at large. As Mr. Trebek stated, take it one day at a time.

## Upcoming Events

To better serve prostate cancer survivors and loved ones, we will endeavor to provide information about conferences when the information becomes available. There are several conferences this spring that may be of interest to our readers.

The **First Annual Bangor Region Cancer Conference** is sponsored by the **Christine B Foundation** and will be held on Saturday, April 4, 2020, from 8:45 AM to 1:30 PM. The conference will be held in Eastport Hall at the University of Maine Augusta – Bangor Campus. The topic of this free event is "The Cancer Journey: From Surviving to Thriving." Several keynote speakers and breakout sessions are planned. Lunch will be provided. For additional information and to register go to [www.chrisbfund.org/conference](http://www.chrisbfund.org/conference) or call the Christine B Foundation at 207-517-0256. Just in: Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, this conference has been postponed. Please refer to the Christine B Foundation website for updates on the rescheduling of this event.

The second sponsored by the **Hospice Volunteers of Hancock County** is on Thursday, May 14, 2020, at the Faith Community Fellowship Church in Trenton. The topic is Intimacy and Sexuality During Illness and Loss. A local panel will present in the morning from approximately 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM. Following this, a national panel will present on the same topic via a pre-recorded DVD. At the conclusion, lunch will be served.

The third conference of interest is the **Annual Massachusetts Prostate Cancer Symposium**. The conference will be held on Friday, May 15, 2020, from 7:30 AM – 1:30 PM. The location is the Newton Mariette, 2345 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton. Keynote speaker will be Dr. Peter Pinto of the National Institutes of Health. His topic is "MRI: The Past, Present, and Future." Also, there will be ten educational sessions. There is a minimal fee to attend this event. For more information, call 617-4823044 or email [info@masspcc.org](mailto:info@masspcc.org).

Another important event takes place on Sunday, June 7, 2020. It is the **Annual National Cancer Survivors Day**. The day has been set aside to honor those who, with strength and courage, are living with a history of cancer. Contact your local cancer resource center to find out more information about events planned for the day.

## COVID-19 Nutritional Assistance for Cancer Patients

If you are a cancer patient who is at high risk for THE COVID-19 virus and reside in Piscataquis County, Penobscot County, Hancock County, or Washington County and you need nutritious food, please contact the Christine B Foundation. The Christine B Foundation has partnered with food banks in Eastern Maine to provide food to cancer patients in need. Volunteers will make food deliveries.

Items provided can relieve the nutritional burden for 3 – 6 days. To receive this assistance, go to <http://www.chrisbfund.org/nutrition> and follow the directions to request this assistance.