



European Association for Cancer Education

32nd Annual Scientific Meeting

Educating Patient Navigators to Competently Facilitate Care and Improve Health Behaviors

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The purpose of this presentation is to describe the education and training provided to lay patient navigators (PNs) to assure they are competent to both facilitate cancer patients' access to care and to improve the cancer-related health behaviors of their communities. Patient navigators have been used in the US and globally for decades. Over time, the PN role has expanded to encompass activities for all aspects of the cancer continuum from outreach to end-of-life.

Native American Cancer Research Corporation (NACR) began its first PN training in 1984 to facilitate American Indian women's access to mammography screening. Since then, NACR has been using lay PNs to provide education, counseling and support to cancer patients, families and communities. To ensure PNs are qualified and competent to undertake navigator roles, NACR developed a standard PN education program with added education content, activities and skills focused on a specific population, health behavior and/or community need.

The basic program includes a minimum of 120 hours of content, focusing on cancer/cancer care, education/presentation principles, informed consent/confidentiality, providing counseling and support, and finding resources and facilitating access to care. In addition, PNs take part in interactive activities including role playing, counseling practice, and peer review while faculty undertake direct observation and formal evaluation of the PN's knowledge, behaviors and skills.

Most recently education has expanded to include improving health behaviors such as helping community members stop smoking and encouraging cancer patients to be physically active. For the former, specialist training in tobacco cessation and motivational interviewing was added through formal programs; for the latter, the PNs worked with an athletic trainer to facilitate movement and assist patients to use stretch bands. In 2018, quarterly 3-day education programs on all aspects of navigation content and services were added to ensure continual updating of PN knowledge and skills.

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