

# 2016 Public Outcomes Report: Quality Improvement – Chemotherapy Education

A cancer diagnosis can be devastating, affecting every part of you. That's why we strongly believe in treating patients as a whole person—body, mind and spirit. It is also why we offer more than just powerful technology and treatments. We also offer sincere care that puts patients at the center of their treatment. We are committed to helping patients deal with emotional and physical effects of their disease and prepare for a healthier life after treatment.

At the Virginia Piper Cancer Institute – River Falls Area Hospital, we have significantly enhanced patient centered care by offering patients an education session before starting chemotherapy treatment. Prior to 2016, chemotherapy education was provided during the first chemotherapy visit. Although this offered convenience because an additional visit wasn't required, it was reported to be quite stressful because patients weren't sure what to expect before arriving at the hospital for their first treatment. Studies have shown that anxiety may interfere with retention of information shared during education sessions and this was the case for patients receiving education during the stressful first day of chemotherapy. Our goal was to lower patient and family anxiety and increase a sense of calm and well-being by providing appropriate education prior to the start of treatment. Changes in our initial chemotherapy education were implemented in March 2016.

Our cancer care coordinator meets with patients and families prior to the first day of chemotherapy in a relaxed atmosphere, outside of the chemotherapy department. The education is specific to the patient's chemotherapy regimen and also gives a general overview of what chemotherapy is and how it works. The cancer care coordinator also discusses common side effects of the prescribed regimen and how side effects can be managed. The patient and family are encouraged to ask any questions they might have in order to best understand the plan of care. This helps the first chemo visit go as smoothly as possible. At the end of the education visit, the patient and family are given a tour

of the facility to identify where they will report for treatment and where to access key resources which are available throughout the facility.

The chemotherapy education visit also includes a stop in the office of the social worker and the hospital billing office to meet a financial specialist. The social worker provides education about support programs and services available to patients dealing with a cancer diagnosis. Some of the services offered include programs to assist with financial difficulties, support groups, transportation and housing. The financial specialist reviews information regarding the patient's insurance coverage for their prescribed treatment and is a resource in the event billing questions arise. We know that the journey through cancer diagnosis, treatment and recovery is challenging for our patients and their families. We also know that for many of our patients, the stress of this journey is complicated by financial pressures. Paying hospital bills and worrying about insurance claims may be the last thing patients and their loved ones want to deal with while they are coping with cancer. That's why the Virginia Piper Cancer Institute has financial specialists committed to helping them throughout their care.

Although our knowledgeable staff does everything they can to connect patients with available resources, there are still times when patients just aren't able to make ends meet financially. The River Falls Area Hospital Foundation's Cancer Patient Assistance Fund helps relieve some of this financial burden so our patients can focus on what's really important—getting better. The Cancer Patient Assistance Fund is available to patients being treated at the Virginia Piper Cancer Institute – River Falls Area Hospital to assist with paying non-medical bills such as mortgage/rent, utilities or child care expenses. This fund is often identified during

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chemotherapy education as a resource which may be beneficial for patients who verbalize stressors with which they are dealing.

A licensed dietitian provides education, assessment and counseling to patients and their guests, working with our health care team to identify opportunities for nutritional intervention or support. As part of the enhanced chemotherapy education program, the dietitian is notified about every new chemotherapy patient and every attempt is made to have the dietitian meet with the patient during their second cycle of chemotherapy. Maintaining good nutrition is especially important during cancer treatment. The disease and its treatments can cause changes in taste, swallowing or the ability to chew food. Treatment can also temporarily change how your body uses food. The Virginia Piper Cancer Institute offers complete nutrition services to help patients cope with these issues.

Cancer rehabilitation can be a beneficial resource to patients across the continuum of care. Before they begin cancer treatment, rehabilitation can help build strength and endurance. While undergoing treatment, it can help maintain physical well-being and reduce

discomfort. After treatment, it can help patients regain function and strength. At Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute, our cancer rehabilitation team addresses every patient's unique needs at each stage of treatment and survivorship. These needs may be related to lymphedema, fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, joint stiffness, weakness, cognitive problems, and issues with communication, swallowing or eating.

When diagnosed with cancer, patients need the best caregivers on their team. At the Virginia Piper Cancer Institute – River Falls Area Hospital, we have a team that not only cares for patients, but cares about patients. We want patients to know that their comfort and care are our primary concerns. Part of providing good care is letting patients know what to expect through the entire treatment process. We encourage all our patients to ask questions and let us know what they need from us at all times. Our goal is to help ease the worry that cancer treatment may cause, to decrease the fear of the unknown, to reduce anxiety prior to receiving their first chemo treatment, and to improve the psychosocial health of our patients.