

Institute of Medicine Report Highlights UCSD Cancer Center Program

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Kim Edwards

Cancer care today can save and prolong many lives, but often fails to address the psychological and social problems associated with the illness. A recently released report by the prestigious Institute of Medicine (IOM) proposes a new standard of care and showcases an innovative program at the Moores Cancer Center at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) called "Patient and Family Support Services: *The Science of Caring*."

The 464-page IOM report, titled "Cancer Care for the Whole Patient: Meeting Psychosocial Health Needs," recommends that oncology care providers screen patients for distress and other problems; connect patients with health care or service providers who have resources to tackle these issues and coordinate care with these professionals; and periodically re-evaluate patients to determine if any changes in care are needed.

UCSD's Science of Caring program was highlighted as a model of the new standard. The program provides comprehensive psychosocial health care integrated with medical treatment and is designed to help ease the emotional, psychological and practical burdens of cancer.

"Killing cancer cells is important, but it is not enough," said Wayne Bardwell, Ph.D., MBA, assistant professor of psychiatry at UCSD, director of UCSD's Patient and Family Support Services: *The Science of Caring* program, and co-director of the Doris Howell Palliative Care Service. "People with cancer and their loved ones often experience anxiety, depression and elevated stress as they deal with cancer in their lives. We have an exceptionally talented group of professionals who care for the patient's mental and emotional health as well as physical health. This program is unique in the way it integrates psychosocial care with standard medical treatment, and by offering palliative care, with a focus on managing symptoms such as pain, from the date of cancer diagnosis."

Typical problems include a lack of information or skills the patient needs to manage the illness; anxiety, depression or other emotional problems; lack of transportation or other resources; and disruptions in work, school and family life. These can cause additional suffering, weaken adherence to prescribed treatments, and threaten the patient's return to health.

An innovative assessment tool developed at the Moores Cancer Center is a touch-screen-based questionnaire that assesses these problems and others faced by patients with cancer. Patient responses, encrypted for privacy, are quickly disseminated by email or pager to appropriate members of their health care team (physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and chaplains) for action.

The Institute of Medicine serves as adviser to the nation to improve health. Established in 1970 under the charter of the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine provides independent, objective, evidence-based advice to policymakers, health professionals, the private sector, and the public.

Media Contact: Kim Edwards, 619-543-6163