

Comprehensive Cancer Patient Treatment Education Will Fill Critical Void Faced by Cancer Patients Between Diagnosis and Treatment



Huntington, NY— On Monday, U.S. Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY) joined cancer survivors and nurse oncologists at Huntington Hospital to announce legislation to provide more resources and education to Medicare beneficiaries diagnosed with cancer. The legislation will fill the information void that often exists for Medicare recipients between their diagnosis with cancer and resulting treatment. Individual sessions with nurse oncologists provide patients and their caregivers with critical information regarding their treatment, potential side effects, and appropriate responses to those side effects. While most oncology practices provide these services, they are currently not covered under Medicare, despite that fact that more than half of all cancer diagnoses occur among people aged 65 or older.

“In the whirlwind between cancer diagnosis and treatment, patients often miss out on critical information and knowledge that can impact their health and well being,” said Congressman Israel, Co-Chair of the House Cancer Caucus. “Medicare recipients fighting cancer should be equipped with the best arsenal of information and resources to fight their disease and navigate through their treatment. Nurse oncologists can fill the void that often exists between diagnosis and treatment by providing patients with information about their treatment plans, how they can manage side effects and how they can minimize adverse health impacts.”

“Quality patient care does not exist without allocating resources to provide detailed education on a course of treatment,” said Georgia Decker, MS, RN, CS-ANP, AOCN®, president of the Oncology Nursing Society. “Nurses are the strategic link between the physician and the caregivers in providing patient education. ONS is committed to working with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to ensure that Medicare provides reimbursement for cancer patient treatment education.”

“Any education given to a patient and their caregiver is always helpful, and the earlier the better, especially with a cancer diagnosis,” added Kevin Dahill, President & CEO of

Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council. "Cancer is a difficult disease that often results in complex and expensive complications, requiring repeated visits to hospital emergency rooms and physician offices. This legislation would help a patient better understand and manage their disease , before complications reach an acute phase and are more expensive to treat."

"Having a registered nurse providing education on treatment plans will improve the delivery of quality cancer care," said Paula Rieger, RN, MSN, AOCN®, FAAN, chief executive officer of ONS. "Oncology nurses spend a great deal of time coordinating treatment plans and continually seek to contain costs while maintaining the highest standards of care."

Many cancer patients experience side effects, symptoms, and late complications associated with their disease and treatment which can adversely impact their wellbeing and quality of life. A recent report by the Institute of Medicine entitled "Ensuring Quality Cancer Care," asserts that "much can be done to relieve the symptoms, ease distress, provide comfort, and in other ways improve the quality of life of someone with cancer. For a person with cancer, maintenance of quality of life requires, at a minimum, relief from pain and other distressing symptoms, relief from anxiety and depressions, including the fear of pain, and a sense of security that assistance will be readily available if needed."

Helping patients to manage their side effects reduces adverse events and the need for urgent or inpatient care. Studies have found that individualized educational intervention for cancer pain management from a registered nurse was effective for patients with cancer being treated in outpatient and homebased settings. Sessions with nurse oncologists in advance of treatment provide cancer patients with resources on managing adverse effects and maximizing well-being.

Israel's legislation, the "Assuring and Improving Cancer Treatment Education and Cancer Symptom Management Act" will provide Medicare reimbursement for the time of registered nurses to educate people diagnosed with cancer, and their caregivers, about their treatment plans. The majority of cancer care today is provided in the outpatient setting or during relatively short hospital admissions. Adequate patient and caregiver education is crucial to reducing morbidity.

More than half of all cancer diagnoses occur among people aged 65 or older, directly impacting the Medicare program. Education makes a difference in helping patients manage significant side effects of treatment and can help to reduce adverse events and the need for urgent or inpatient care.