Minneapolis VA Oncology Nurse Navigators Make a Difference

*By Lara Carson, RN Minneapolis VA Health Care System*

Could 2020 be a more fitting time for this to be the Year of the Nurse? The year 2020 is the Year of the Nurse and May is Oncology Nurse month.

Minneapolis VA Health Care System (HCS) is proud to introduce Oncology Nurse Navigators: Christie Frid, CNS, ONS; Connie Jaenicke, NP, BMTCN; and Kathleen (Katie) Nelson, CNS, ONS. Together, they have over 60 years of VA nursing experience. They provide in-person, telemedicine and home-telehealth appointments. They also provide in-patient care to coordinate oncology, radiation oncology and chemotherapy treatment for in-patients.

Ms. Jaenicke states “the role of the Oncology Nurse Navigator (ONN) is vital in the early communication with the patient and family members” to provide education, information and reduce anxiety about the diagnosis. The benefits of having an advanced practice nurse in the role is their ability to order and interpret testing and to order treatments while navigating, therefore streamlining care. They can also assist in providing education, assessing and coordinating consult services to address financial and psychological challenges.

**Christie Frid speaking to patient on the phone.

Description automatically generated** A 2016 article in **The Journal of Clinical Pathways** states that Nurse Navigation “can improve access to the cancer care system by addressing community, facility, and literacy barriers as well as monitoring and facilitating quality care. The benefits of patient navigation for patient outcomes seems to be considerable. With respect to cost effectiveness, … the modest cost of navigation can be easily offset by savings due to stage shifts that will result in the avoidance of the high costs of treating advanced cancer.”

Ms. Christie Frid supports the team with her background in Radiation Oncology. Patients often have a hard time understanding how Oncology and Radiation Oncology are different and complement each other to provide optimal treatment to fight cancer. Ms. Frid states that because the role of a Nurse Navigator is meant to provide comprehensive navigation through concurrent cancer therapy modalities, coordination across radiation, surgery and chemotherapy is smoother.

*Christie Frid, CNS, ONS*

Tracking navigation care is essential in creating a comprehensive cancer treatment plan. Ms. Nelson states that “developing, utilizing and maintaining a database is essential and allows for easy extraction of patient specific information to track what services are needed, establishing important dates or timelines for treatment, to ensure critical interventions are completed in the correct order for maximum treatment benefit to coordinate interdisciplinary services needed for that patient (i.e. palliative care, nutrition, mental health, research studies).”

Nurse Navigators help develop a comprehensive and individualized cancer treatment plan. In 2015, the Journal of **Oncology Navigation and Survivorship** studied patients with breast cancer and found that a single Nurse Navigator visit that included “education about their upcoming surgery and recovery, discussion of available resources, and emotional support decreased distress in many of the patients that were studied. The subjects were asked to fill out a “distress thermometer” before and after that visit. Common anecdotal themes were also discovered from pre- and post-visit. Pre-visit descriptive themes included “stressed” and “alone, while post-visit with the Nurse Navigator, the themes included “less anxious”, “relief” and “empowered”.

In summary, Nurse Navigation plays a critical support role within the Minneapolis VA Oncology Clinic. A Nurse Navigator uses extensive nursing insight and experience to assist the patient through a comprehensive cancer treatment journey. This comprehensive, critical care planning and support can increase patient satisfaction, reduce patient and caregiver/family distress, and facilitate collateral treatment options. Minneapolis VA HCS and its Veterans are extremely fortunate to have these experienced and dedicated Nurse Navigators.

**Efficacy of the Breast Cancer Navigator Role in Reducing Distress in Newly Diagnosed Breast Cancer Patients: A Pilot Study.** *Journal of Oncology Navigation Survivorship*. [May 2018 Vol 9, No 5](http://www.jons-online.com/issues/2018/may-2018-vol-9-no-5) —May 22, 2018. [Patricia Johnson, BS, RN, OCN, CBCN](http://www.jons-online.com/jons-authors/716-patricia-johnson-bs-rn-ocn-cbcn)

**The Role of Patient Navigation in Improving the Value of Oncology Care.** J Clin Pathways. 2016;2(1):41-47. Received August 14, 2015; accepted December 16, 2015. Sheryl Riley, RN, OCN, CMCN1; Cortney Riley, BS, DPT2