Mitigation of colorectal cancer screening disparities targeted

**Description:** The project Reducing Cancer Disparities through Comprehensive Cancer Control increased targeted colorectal cancer screening among the underserved African American community and developed an urban patient navigation program. It also identified health literacy barriers and patient navigation needs of rural cancer patients in Wisconsin.

**Relevance:** Many cancer patients experience literacy barriers and navigation needs, especially in medically underserved communities in the state. Low health literacy can lead to delays in care, preventable hospitalization, medication errors and increased mortality among cancer patients. In rural Wisconsin, 33 percent of cancer patients have low health literacy skills.

**Results:** The Rural Oncology Literacy Enhancement Study (ROLES) surveyed six UW Carbone Cancer Center Oncology Outreach Clinics to evaluate health literacy barriers and patients’ navigation needs. The assessment confirmed that the rural oncology clinics are a significant asset to the communities in which they serve.

Results from the needs assessment showed that approximately 50 percent of patients indicated that they sometimes or always have trouble understanding written materials from their clinic and more than 37 percent sometimes or always have trouble filling out medical forms by themselves. Health care professionals also identified several areas of concern, including the lack of referral agreements, limited access to previous medical records and lack of a system to assess and address patients’ non-medical needs.

Based on the information received, researchers designed a patient navigation program that was implemented at Beaver Dam Community Hospital. The study partners continue to evaluate and strengthen the program for new cancer patients, and health literacy training is a mandatory element of nurses’ orientation. Researchers also are seeking funds to expand the patient navigation program’s evaluation protocol and to ease processes and data collection by integrating technology into daily nurse procedures.

The project also established the Milwaukee Westside Colorectal Cancer Screening Collaborative within the Milwaukee Regional Cancer Care Network. The collaborative implemented a colorectal cancer screening and navigation program for patients 50 and older who had not been screened in the previous year. Screening with the immunological fecal occult blood test (iFOBT) has increased, patients are more aware of and engaged in screening for colorectal cancer and many are pleased to have the iFOBT option.

