



cancer
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Cancer Commons Virtual Services

Cancer patients are facing major challenges when confronting their illness. Not only do they have to make sense of their malignancy and how it may impact their well-being, they also have to find the experts who can provide them with the latest treatment options. On top of these challenges, they have to maneuver to fit treatment schedules into their own work and personal lives. Therefore, it is not a surprise that cancer patients are experiencing concurrent anxiety and despair when confronted by forces that they seem helpless to control.

Oncologists are uniquely positioned as primary providers for cancer patients, not only to treat their malignancy but also to provide the much needed psychosocial support. But unlike primary care physicians, oncologists do not already have a longstanding relationship with these patients when their cancer initially strikes. Therefore, patients often seek advice from trusted relatives and friends, the internet as well as media channels. Quite often, when facing a potentially life-threatening malignancy, patients often seek second or third opinions on conventional treatments as well as clinical trials that can potentially give them a chance to beat the odds. However, this is a time consuming process, requiring gathering and mailing of medical records, radiology data and pathology slides to the individual experts so that each one renders an opinion in a sequential manner. This may cause a delay in enrollment in a clinical trial or even the implementation of conventional treatments. However, the Virtual Tumor Board (VTB) provided by Cancer Commons can potentially speed up this process of obtaining a second opinion. This is because the VTB is on-line and consists of a panel of scientists and experts practicing at academic institutions to review patients' clinical data and render a set of recommendations based on the provided clinical, radiological and molecular information. This process is, in our opinion, much more comprehensive and faster than seeking an opinion from each expert in a individual fashion.

Second Opinion Gives Cancer Patients Hope

Cancer patients need affirmation that their treatment is the best one for them. This is often accomplished by seeking second or even third opinions. The additional opinions give them hope and a sense that they have made the best possible treatment decision out of the chaos that they are confronting. However, this is a time-consuming process, requiring the expert to review medical records, radiology data and pathology slides. Patients may also require travel to another institution, in another state or even cross country in order to obtain that opinion or screening for clinical trials. As a result, treatment may be delayed. Therefore, a consensus opinion obtained online and opinions from a panel of experts may be more appropriate for some patients.

VTB Provides a More Convenient Means of Obtaining a Second Opinion

Cancer Commons PhD Scientists research personalized treatment options for each patient. This initial option set is then presented to a Virtual Tumor Board (VTB), where nationally- recognized experts in specific cancer types will refine them into an action plan for patients. We moderate this discussion to drive consensus and capture the rationale behind every decision. The VTB's conclusions are then compiled into a Cancer Commons Report, which patients can discuss with their oncologist.

The VTB at Cancer Commons meets weekly to review patient cases. This is done either synchronously by video conferencing or asynchronously via computer correspondence. For patient data that are completely assembled, a consensus can be reached and an opinion rendered within a week. Therefore, unlike seeking a second opinion in person, our VTB system reduces the amount of time required to get an opinion.

VTB May Provide A More Comprehensive Opinion of Treatment Options

The practicing oncologists in VTB are based at academic institutions and they have advanced expertise in their respective subspecialties in oncology. Furthermore, VTB consists not just one but a panel of experts who review patient cases. We believe a consensus opinion is probably more thoughtful after consideration of all possible conventional treatment and clinical trial options available in the United States. Therefore, the VTB review is more comprehensive than seeking an opinion from experts individually.

Expert Opinion for Oncologists

Oncologists are facing a myriad of challenges in their routine care of cancer patients. They have to be up to date on their treatments and navigate the vertiginous process of pre-approvals and denial for oncologic drugs from insurers, while at the same time tending the patient's psychosocial needs. There is just not enough time to deal with all these issues and "burn out" among oncologists has become a front-and-center issue in the practice of oncology. Therefore, any ancillary services that can help patients navigate the complex cancer treatment environment will definitely allow oncologists to provide better care in general. This would ultimately lead to increased satisfaction in their practice and improvement of their well-being.

The expert opinion provided by VTB is one example that can potentially help practicing oncologists. The opinion is an amalgamated consensus after review of patient data by a panel of individuals who are experts in their respective fields in treating the particular malignancy that the patient has. The patient's treating oncologist can then review the options provided and work out a treatment plan that fits best for the patient. Ultimately, the process can help the oncologist to provide cancer care to patients and at the same time help them navigate the complex cancer treatment environment.

In conclusion, the services of Cancer Commons can provide a great value for cancer patients and their oncologists. Experts provide a set of conventional treatment options as well as clinical trials that patients may qualify for. This valuable service can put patients and their physicians at ease knowing the treatment options available to them and having the peace of mind that no stone has been left unturned.