



Health Awareness

Effective Communication Is Key For People With Cancer

(NAPSA)—An increasing number of cancer patients can find help from a surprising source—their own voices.

Good communication is considered crucial to patient care, especially for people with cancer. A number of studies have found that communication between doctors and patients can help improve the quality of care received.

Unfortunately, some patients don't speak up about their concerns as much as they should. A recent survey conducted by CancerCare, a national non-profit organization that provides free professional help to people with cancer through counseling, education, information and referral and direct financial assistance, found that two-thirds of cancer patients want to understand their diagnosis and treatments better than they currently do.

Feelings of anxiety are common among people with cancer. Nearly one in four patients surveyed did not feel comfortable calling their doctor with questions between visits. This is especially troubling because side effects of chemotherapy, such as nausea and vomiting, most often occur while patients are at home and can lead to considerable distress and disruption in daily activities.



Cancer patients need to keep open lines of communication with their physicians.

There are several reasons why patients may not feel comfortable discussing their treatment side effects such as nausea and vomiting. Many patients:

- fear that side effects are an inevitable part of chemotherapy treatment;
- perceive that experiencing side effects means their chemotherapy is working; and
- fear their chemotherapy regimen may be stopped because of side effects.

It's important for people with cancer to talk to their doctor about any side effects of chemotherapy they are experiencing. Together, patients and their doctors can determine what options are available to them.

“While the need for communication between patients and their doctors might seem obvious, unfortunately, some patients don't feel comfortable talking to their doctor about their condition,” said Diane Blum, executive director of CancerCare. “Patients need to speak up and have an open dialogue with their doctor about what they are experiencing because it may have an impact on the care they receive. Doctors may be able to help their patients by offering a variety of treatment options, including medications.”

To make communicating with their doctor easier and more effective, patients can:

- write out a list of questions before their appointment;
- bring a friend or family member with them;
- write down the answers to questions; and
- get the name of a nurse or social worker for after-hours advice.

People can learn more about managing cancer from the experts at CancerCare. The following Web sites may provide more information on how to talk with your doctor as well as ways to cope with treatment and help manage side effects: www.cancercare.org, www.cancer.org and www.plwc.org.