

The Bridge Program: A Model for Lung Cancer Survivorship

Podcast Script

Amy: Thank you for joining us today, Jim and Abby. Jim, Could you talk a little bit about life after lung cancer? What does that term cancer survivor mean that many of us hear often?

Jim: The term cancer survivor refers to people living with cancer from the time of diagnosis, through the balance of his or her life. The scope of cancer survivorship acknowledges that others are affected by a person's cancer such as family members, friends, and caregivers. It is a term that is widely used throughout the cancer field.

Amy: How many people in the United States are currently living with cancer?

Jim: Nearly 15 million Americans who have been diagnosed with cancer are currently living in the United States. About one in eight or almost 14% of West Virginia adults are living with cancer. Although the rate of people who get cancer is going down, the overall number of people who have cancer is going up, because people are living longer due to the improvements in finding and treating cancer.

Amy: What types of challenges do cancer survivors face?

Jim: We know that people living with cancer face physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and financial issues at diagnosis, during treatment, and for the remaining years of their lives. It is critical that cancer providers recognize these challenges and support patients throughout the entire scope of their cancer experience.

Amy: So one of the topics we wanted to talk about today is the Bridge Program. Can you tell me how the Bridge Program came about?

Jim: We know that West Virginia has one of the highest incidence rates of lung cancer in the United States. According to the West Virginia Cancer Registry, lung cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among West Virginia residents

accounting for 18% of cancers diagnosed in the State each year. In order to respond to this challenge the WVU Cancer Institute is committed to meeting the needs of lung cancer patients and their families by developing services like the Bridge Program.

The program is funded by the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation's "Bridging Cancer Care" initiative. The Foundation recognized that several Appalachia states, including West Virginia, are significantly affected by lung cancer and invited states to develop innovative approaches to support lung cancer patients and their families. The WVU Cancer Institute's Bridge Program was chosen for funding through a competitive grant process by the Foundation and we are excited to be working with a dedicated partner like Bristol-Myers Squibb.

Amy: What does the Bridge Program offer lung cancer survivors and their families?

Abby: We have learned from our survivorship assessment, that all of our patients still have ongoing needs and concerns following lung cancer treatment. Our goal at the Bridge Program, is to address these needs with a multi-disciplinary team, and provide support to the patient, and their families.

The Program offers a half-day clinic that brings together a team of health care professionals from multiple disciplines to create a comprehensive survivorship care plan tailored to the specific needs of each patient.

At the clinic each patient has the opportunity to meet individually with a nurse practitioner, licensed social worker, dietician, psychiatrist, physical and occupational therapists, and a smoking cessation specialist. The patient leaves the clinic with their comprehensive survivorship care plan in hand. The Plan is also forwarded to the patient's primary care physician.

In the months following the clinic, the patient can expect follow-up communication from the lung survivorship program coordinator and additional assessments are completed to ensure assistance with any additional health concerns or needs and that patients are satisfied with our services.

Amy: You mention a plan, can you tell me a little bit more about what is included in a survivorship care plan?

Abby: The care plan is developed by a cancer patient's health care team and is considered to be part of the overall standard of care for all cancer patients. Our survivorship care plans contain patient specific information about treatment, and potential side effects. The plans also address each unmet need identified by the patient in the initial survivorship assessment.

Amy: Can you give me an example of what a care plan would look like for someone dealing with psychological distress as a result of lung cancer?

Abby: Yes, patients within the Bridge Program who identify any psychological needs are seen by our psychiatrist at the Cancer Center for further assessment. The strategy to address psychological needs as part of the overall survivorship plan are developed by both the psychiatrist and the patient. It would include offering interventions that meet the patient where he or she is. It might involve health education, coping skills training, stress management or counseling support. If the patient needs ongoing support then a referral is made to ensure that the patient has access to those services close to home.

Jim: We know that psychological distress is common with lung cancer survivors. Up to 80 percent of lung cancer survivors experience psychological distress, and this rate is three times more common than observed among survivors of other types of cancers.

The cause of heightened distress in lung cancer survivorship may be associated in part with the poor prognosis and stigma attached to this disease. Given that lung cancer is highly linked with tobacco smoking, lung cancer patients report that others tend to assume they are at fault for getting lung cancer. This self-blaming can lead to a great deal of guilt and distress on the part of a lung cancer patient and often is not addressed during routine cancer treatment but does receive attention as part of the Bridge Program.

Amy: Thank you. I understand that psychological distress is just one of the many issues that the Bridge Program can help with. Can you give us a few closing comments about the program?

Jim: Well, the WVU Cancer Institute is strongly committed to ensuring the highest quality of life for all cancer survivors and their loved ones. So the focus is on bringing quality of life to these patients. If you are a lung cancer survivor or

family member and want to talk to us directly about the Bridge Program please call us at 304-293-2370.

Closing statement: Our podcast was supported by the WVU Cancer Institute Bridge Program with a grant from the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation. Please forward any questions or comments to us via email at cpc@hsc.wvu.edu or visit our website for more information at wvucancer.org/cancer-prevention-control. Thank you for listening.