



Clinical Pathways:

Ensuring Quality Care and Value in Cancer Treatment

A major challenge in cancer care today is eliminating the wide and often unnecessary variation in treatment that increases the cost of care without any additional clinical benefit to patients. With soaring cancer care costs driven by promising but expensive new drugs and biologic therapies, many patients are burdened with financial difficulties that negatively impact quality of life and outcomes. While oncologists strive to treat patients with the regimen that offers the best outcome with the lowest toxicity and the lowest possible cost, achieving this goal for every patient is extremely difficult without clinical pathways guiding the decision-making process.

Oncology Stakeholders Embrace Clinical Pathways

Clinical pathways are evidence-based, detailed treatment guides for delivering cancer care that help oncologists select the most appropriate course of treatment for an individual patient. Based on type, stage and biomarkers associated with a disease, as well as other factors relating to the patient, clinical pathways take into consideration the efficacy, toxicity and cost of different treatment options. Treatments are narrowed into a concise list of choices that drive the best possible outcome with the most manageable toxicities, providing the most value to patients and payers.

Currently used by a wide range of healthcare providers and health systems, pathways are also gaining favor with insurance companies. Sixty health insurance plans providing coverage to approximately 170 million individuals in the United States are presently implementing oncology pathways programs.¹ In the emerging value-based environment, clinical pathways are becoming a valuable tool in cancer care and essential to strengthening relationships with payers. Patients are increasingly being directed by payers to practices that have implemented clinical pathways.

Southern Cancer Center Participates in The US Oncology Network's Value Pathways

The US Oncology Network (The Network) is a pioneer in clinical pathways development. In 2013, The Network collaborated with The National Comprehensive Cancer Network® (NCCN®) to transform its existing pathways (Level I Pathways) into Value Pathways powered by NCCN™, using NCCN evidence-based guidelines as a foundation. NCCN guidelines are the most thorough and frequently updated clinical practice guidelines in any area of medicine and are recognized as the gold standard for clinical policy in cancer care.²

Value Pathways powered by NCCN are continually updated and enhanced to include the very latest, most effective therapies. As part of The Network, Southern Cancer Center has access to this critical program. We collaborate with The Network's 1,400 physicians across the country to reduce the complexity of cancer care and provide consistent, quality care based on the highest level of clinical evidence.



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Pathways Reduce Costs While Driving Quality and Value

A study conducted at eight practices in The US Oncology Network evaluating the cost-effectiveness of Level I Pathways in non-small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC) patients found that **outpatient costs were 35% lower for on-pathway versus off-pathway patients** (average 12-month cost, \$18,042 v \$27,737, respectively), with no difference in overall survival or by line of therapy.³ A separate Level I Pathways study analyzing two distinct databases for colon cancer patients found that costs for on-pathway treatment were less than off-pathway, and survival was comparable with clinical outcomes reported in the published literature.⁴

Multiple clinical studies of other programs and practices provide strong evidence that clinical pathways in oncology reduce cost of care while maintaining or improving outcomes:

- A cost and survival analysis before and after implementation of a clinical pathway in metastatic stage IV NSCLC patients demonstrated a **\$15,013 savings for the 12-month cost of care after pathways implementation**. Clinical outcomes were not compromised, with similar median overall survival times (10.7 months before v 11.2 months after pathways).⁵
- An evaluation of a multistate oncology clinical pathways program implemented by CareFirst demonstrated lower chemotherapy costs and hospitalizations in patients of compliant practice sites compared to noncompliant sites. **Pathways resulted in \$10.3 million in savings** by participant sites (\$7.0 million from drugs and \$3.3 million from hospitalizations).⁶

Value Pathways Offer Important Clinical and Financial Benefits to Patients

While oncology practices and payers have much to gain when patients are treated with The Network's Value Pathways, patients also receive significant benefits that support better outcomes, improved quality of life and reduced cost of care:⁷

Optimized clinical outcomes

Since Value Pathways incorporate the latest and most effective treatments, patients have the best opportunity to achieve optimal outcomes. The list of treatment options may include promising new immunotherapy drugs, new combination therapies of existing drugs, chemoradiation, or novel clinical trials.

Reduced clinical toxicity

Value Pathways address not only the most effective treatment options, but also consider their respective adverse effects. Some treatments have similar efficacy but different toxicity profiles, and pathways can help physicians choose the treatment with the most manageable toxicities for each individual patient.

Decreased financial burden

Bankruptcy is a risk factor for early mortality in cancer patients,⁸ and patients with limited financial resources have significantly increased pain, greater symptom burden and overall poorer quality of life.⁹ Value Pathways help oncologists evaluate the financial impact of different treatment options to reduce the patient's cost whenever possible.

Grounded in evidence-based medicine, Value Pathways drive high-quality, cost-effective care that offers the best opportunity for positive outcomes. To ensure your patients are treated with Value Pathways, refer them to Southern Cancer Center, part of The US Oncology Network.

Sources

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