

Topic Overview

Improving Pain and Symptom Management in Cancer Care in Ontario

**Citizen panel
19 September 2015**

The McMaster Health Forum convened a citizen panel on how to improve pain and symptom management in cancer care in Ontario. The panel was organized with the support of McMaster University's Labarge Optimal Aging Initiative and the Government of Ontario (through a Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Health System Research Fund grant entitled *Harnessing Evidence and Values for Health System Excellence*). The panel brought together 7 citizens from across the region covered by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network to examine the problem, options for addressing it, and key implementation considerations. The purpose of the panel was to guide the efforts of policymakers, managers and professional leaders who make decisions about our health system.

Discussing the problem

Participants discussed the main challenges related to improving pain and symptom management in cancer care in Ontario, and the following seven problems were viewed as the most pressing: 1) healthcare providers don't have the time to support the full range of pain and symptom management needs of individuals living with cancer; 2) there are major inconsistencies in the pain and symptom management supports patients receive across providers and settings, particularly during transitions from regional cancer centres to primary-care and community-care settings; 3) healthcare providers and individuals living with cancer are not communicating effectively about pain and symptom management; 4) individuals living with cancer often lack vital information and knowledge that would enable them to play an active role in managing their pain and symptoms; 5) accessing the full range of pain and symptom management support is not always easy; 6) there is a lack of accountability measures in the system that assign responsibility for ensuring individuals living with cancer receive comprehensive pain and symptom management support ; and 7) too much emphasis is placed on pain management, while supportive care for other distressful symptoms can often be overlooked.



The views expressed in the panel summary are the views of panel participants and should not be taken to represent the views of the Government of Ontario, McMaster University, McMaster University's Labarge Optimal Aging Initiative, or the authors of the panel summary.





Seven citizens from across the region covered by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network gathered during a McMaster Health Forum event on 19 September 2015.

Discussing the options

Panel participants considered three possible options for improving cancer pain and symptom management: 1) getting the best information about pain and symptom management to everyone who needs it; 2) providing targeted payments to health providers and organizations for following guidelines about pain and symptom management; and 3) organizing care differently to make it easier to provide pain and symptom management. All participants supported options 1 and 3, while many participants strongly opposed to option 2, particularly when discussions focused on the possibility of payments targeted at individual healthcare providers. Several values-based themes emerged during the discussion, although the theme of collaboration was most consistently discussed. Participants felt this values-based theme was especially important with respect to improving how information moves among patients and healthcare providers, and

among providers working in teams (option 1). Strengthening collaboration among the full range of providers and across all settings where pain and symptom management care is (or could be) delivered was also frequently discussed (option 3).

Discussing the implementation considerations

When considering barriers to implementing the options considered, participants viewed limited resources, engrained physician behaviour and fragmentation between cancer care and other supportive services (e.g., mental health services) as the most challenging. Despite these barriers, participants were optimistic about the potential for change given improvements in information technology, and the perceived commitment of decision-makers in the cancer care system in Ontario to make things better.

Panel deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the [citizen brief](#) that was presented to participants before the panel and the [summary](#) of the panel. For an electronic copy of the citizen brief or panel summary, visit our website www.mcmasterhealthforum.com



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