



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
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Joanna Carns, Director
Office of Correction Ombuds
The Evergreen State College
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RE: Cancer Report

The OCO investigation which details histories of incarcerated individuals diagnosed with cancer demonstrates patient care timelines which do not meet our goals for the quality of care DOC Health Services intends to provide to our patients. It is not acceptable for those under our care to experience waits for diagnostics and treatments that could potentially impact their wellbeing.

We know that waiting for information and appointments can cause distress for our patients and their loved ones and erode their confidence in the services we provide.

DOC Health Services committees have reviewed records from these cases to identify gaps in care quality which prolong care timelines. We have looked particularly closely at underlying causes of potential care delays and inefficiencies in diagnostic processes.

Throughout the past nine months, Health Services have increased efforts via a number of initiatives targeted to improve the reliability and efficiency of processes within the pathways our patients follow to diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

Actions to avoid delays (patients A, C, F, G, J) for off-site specialty care appointments have included:

- deploying additional transportation teams (MCC, WCC)
- creating a software tracking tool to follow cancer care timelines (9/2020, ongoing)
- establishing expectations for team supervision and coordination (9/2020, ongoing)
- on site workflow process assessments (7/9/20, 7/16/20, 8/10/20) and team coordination quality improvement at a pilot site (11/30/20-12/9/2020)
- facilitating staff positions for offsite scheduling (CRCC, SCCC, MCC)

Actions to improve efficiency and accuracy of the diagnostic process (patients A, B, D, E, G, I, K) have included:

- holding statewide clinical education sessions (9/2019, 2/2020, 10/2020)
- providing direct feedback to facility care teams (recurrent)

- deploying clinical supervision tools and expectations (6/2020)
- revising training materials for resolving health-related complaints with a focus on safety (11/2020)
- creating data methods to add reliability to primary and preventive care processes which are currently based on paper charting (pilots ongoing)

In addition, expectations have been reinforced for custody and care staff at two sites to coordinate timely access to primary care from restricted housing at two sites (patients H and I).

Lack of access to clinical scheduling software and/or an electronic health record cannot be overstated as a barrier to efficient and coordinated care.


DOC Health Services has submitted legislative requests to fund an electronic medical record and staffing changes which would further support care reliability and quality improvement. Meanwhile, the above quality improvement measures will continue through use of paper chart records and means available.

To date, our software system reflects an 86% reduction in the potentially cancer-related offsite referrals which are over 100 days past target due dates (from 445 to 49, combined clinical or administrative resolution). Our next goal is to reduce this number to zero as soon as possible, within the next fiscal quarter. We then plan to address those consults that are past the 30-day target.

DOC Health Services fully appreciates our responsibility to deliver safe and quality care to incarcerated individuals in Washington prisons, and consider shortening patient timelines to access cancer-related treatments a priority.

Respectfully,


Dan Johnson, Assistant Secretary
Health Services Division


Dr. Sara Kariko, Chief Medical Officer
Health Services Division