

RESOURCE CENTER

By Michelle Martin

Assessing Your Cancer Registry

Having a well-functioning registry is an asset to any facility.

AS THE NEED to document, study and understand cancer grows more critical every day, so too does the need for an accurate, effective and efficient cancer registry. However, working at optimum efficiency can be challenging for scores of registrars.

Because cancer registrars do not provide direct patient care nor perform obvious revenue-generating functions, their efforts can be overlooked by administration, leading them to volunteer for extra high-profile responsibilities in an attempt to gain recognition. In time, the "volunteer" activities become expectations and requirements of the job.

Often organizational leaders equate passing the Commission on Cancer (CoC) survey with having an optimally performing cancer registry. But this is not always the case. The CoC survey process is designed to evaluate the quality management and care of the oncology patient—which is often based on data collected by the registry—not the efficiency of the organization's cancer registry itself.

Keeping this in perspective, hospital administrators typically rely on certified tumor registrars (CTRs) as advisers and informal leaders to interpret, educate staff and provide proper documentation in line with CoC standards. However, cancer registrars often don't have job descriptions, nor the authority to compel other departments—such as clinical, allied health and administrative staff—to provide the required data and reports necessary to maintain a CoC-accredited cancer program.

The registry too often inherits associated responsibilities like the cancer program annual report, committee reports and minutes, audio/visual functions and development of agendas associated with cancer conferences. Needless to say, when added to the registrars' primary function, this quickly becomes an overwhelming workload.

In their defense, administrators are not always aware of the time-consuming internal and external challenges registrars must overcome to obtain information for the patient abstract. Once the information is made available, the CTR must convert the volumes of medical records into coded data to meet data collection standards. There are also the tight data collection and submission timeframes required by state registry and accreditation governing bodies. Conducting a registry assessment is beneficial to both the administration and the cancer registry staff to ensure the registry is properly staffed and using accurate, efficient and effective practices.

A registry assessment and workflow analysis by outside

consultants allow for an objective look at registrars' day-to-day activities. Consultants compare these duties to registrar job descriptions (if they exist) and facility policies. Because every facility is different, time standards for cancer registry-specific activities don't exist. By analyzing a hospital's specific culture and cancer registry job responsibilities, the consultant can provide recommendations for reasonable productivity standards and task-specific time management processes.

A formal assessment can validate appropriate staffing of a cancer registry and shed light on the importance of the registrars' work. Promoting an understanding of registrars' vital role can improve working relations between the registry and other departments, prompting better quality work and a more positive work environment.

For many administrators, deciding whether a registry assessment would benefit their facility is not easy. Here are some questions to consider:

- Could all the reporting and activities required of the cancer committee continue uninterrupted if the facility lost the cancer registry?
 - If a CTR needed an extended leave of absence, would the facility have the appropriate processes and procedures in place to allow for temporary staffing?
 - When was the last time the quality of the cancer registry's data was validated by an independent source who could compare the abstract to the complete medical record?
 - Are cancer registrars performing too many duties outside their primary function? Are they appropriately educated?
 - Is the cancer registry being recognized for its efficiency and highlighted as a great resource for the facility?
 - Do CTRs feel like their jobs are misunderstood by those outside the field? Do they want people to understand the value of what they do?

Having a well-functioning registry is an asset to any facility. An effective registry enables health professionals to better understand and address the cancer burden, improving patient care and increasing a facility's credibility. Performing routine registry assessments can not only improve efficiency, but also help provide a better work environment for registrars. This will ultimately promote a better understanding of cancer incidences and treatment successes. ■

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