

Transportation and Lodging Care (TLC) Pilot Program - Support for Patients Undergoing Cancer Treatment

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1. Background

In 2020, 43 percent of the University of Florida Health Cancer Center (UFHCC) catchment area residents reported living in areas of high social economic vulnerability, with 29 percent of oncology patients treated at UF Health living in rural areas where 19 percent of residents live in persistent poverty. Within this population, the most frequently reported logistical barriers to accessing health care are related to financial toxicity, which in turn is associated with lower quality of life, higher rates of negative symptoms, and worsened survival rates. Providing support to oncology patients to minimize financial and logistical hardships associated with accessing care is necessary to address health disparities and ensure equitable access to evidence-based cancer care, including treatment on clinical trials. Supported through a grant from the Climb for Cancer Foundation and supplemented by institutional funding, the Transportation and Lodging (TLC) Pilot Program was developed to help address this need.

2. Goals

Key goals for this project include:

1. Improve treatment adherence and trial participation rates
2. Increase overall trial accrual, but specifically improve recruitment of underrepresented groups to cancer treatment trials
3. Assess feasibility of financial support programs to ameliorate out-of-pocket health care costs

3. Solutions and Methods

The TLC Pilot Program was established as a jointly managed project by the UFHCC Clinical Research Office (CRO) and the UFHCC Office for Community Outreach and Engagement (COE) to support individuals currently undergoing or scheduled to undergo treatment for their cancer at UF Health. Patients reporting barriers to transport, financial constraint, and/or food insecurity are referred to the TLC program via an electronic questionnaire, in which the referring individual is asked to provide information regarding the required treatment schedule, and identify areas in which assistance is needed. Patients are then contacted by a COE Research Navigator who assists in coordinating delivery of available support based on individual need and resource availability.

4. Outcomes

This pilot program is ongoing. Currently TLC offers transportation support, both in the form of gas cards or free scheduled rides, food assistance, and overnight accommodation at partnering hotels for those who require an overnight stay for treatment visits. Referrals can be made by clinical or research staff members on behalf of the patient, and QR-coded informational fliers were created to allow for patients to self-refer.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Future directions for this program include assessing functionality of the referral process, short-term outcomes (patient acceptability, percentage of completed visits using TLC resources, etc.) and long-term outcomes (rates of trial declinations associated with travel and other financial concerns, the impact of intervention on the enrollment of underrepresented groups to treatment trials, and observed treatment

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compliance for patients, etc.). Additional resources and funding can be made available for ongoing support and expansion of this program if it is seen to be beneficial.