



PARTNERING WITH PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Bob Harrison is a nine-year survivor of metastatic prostate cancer. He has spent more time in hospitals and with health care professionals than anyone would want, and his care will continue for years to come. However, as the president of the Patient and Family Advisory Board for the N.C. Cancer Hospital, Harrison is able to use his experiences to help the hospital provide the best care possible.

“I saw my participation in this board as a great opportunity to contribute to a highly rewarding cause, improving the way care is delivered,” said Harrison, who also serves on the Carolina Care committee, which is a steering and oversight committee focused on achieving high levels of customer service throughout UNC Health Care. “An important part of improving care is developing relationships and an environment of collaboration between patients and caregivers.”

Collaboration is essential to improving patient safety, reducing medical errors, promoting adherence to treatment, and increasing patient and family satisfaction. A recent national survey of doctors and hospitalized patients, however, revealed that only 48 percent of patients said they were always included in decisions about their treatment.

“When we set up the Patient and Family Advisory Board, the hospital leadership saw it as critical to the overall operations of the N.C. Cancer Hospital,” said Donald L. Rosenstein, MD, director of the Comprehensive Cancer Support Program, “and I felt strongly that the board needed to have a direct line to the hospital administration.

“Working with the advisory board modifies my thinking in a positive way,” added Dr. Rosenstein, “Seeing board members in administrative meetings reminds me to think about what we’re doing and how we’re doing it from a patient-centered perspective.”

At UNC Health Care, extensive partnership initiatives have been underway for years. These initiatives routinely involve patients and their families in care decisions, as well as in hospital quality improvement projects, patient and family advisory boards, and project committees.

“We are so fortunate to have such a highly engaged, committed group of patient and family board members who are helping us improve the overall quality of cancer care,” said Loretta Muss, coordinator of the board, and a co-chair of Partnering with Patients and Families.

Dr. Rosenstein asked Muss to help establish the board and said her passion for the project has been instrumental in guiding its success. “This board has been pivotal in the creation of new programs and initiatives for our patients and caregivers,” said Muss. “If not for them, our caregiver program would not be up and running and growing rapidly, and our other initiatives would not be where they are.”

In addition to his experience as a patient, Harrison is able to draw on nearly 40 years of professional experience for his work with UNC Health Care. He has

consulted for government and community organizations, as well as private businesses, both domestically and internationally.

“A common thread in all my work has been helping organizations break away from their separate, disconnected silos so they could unite toward shared goals,” said Harrison. “We’re making great progress here, both within the cancer hospital and across the UNC Health Care system, in connecting the gaps that may impede quality care and patient satisfaction.”

Led by efforts within N.C. Children’s Hospital and the N.C. Cancer Hospital, these partnership initiatives have paved the way for numerous improvements in how care is delivered and in how patients and their families view their overall health care experience.

“We are now at a place where family partnerships are a growing part of our culture, and our staff members truly champion this throughout our children’s hospital,” said Tina Schade Willis, MD, division chief of Pediatric Critical Care at N.C. Children’s Hospital.

During 2011, the pediatric intensive care unit implemented significant changes as a result of family input and involvement.

They include creating:

- a policy requiring physicians and nurses to provide timely information to family members throughout all stages of pediatric care
- a standardized process to obtain input from family members during morning medical team rounds
- a “rapid response” capability, which enables family members to alert an emergency medical team for assistance if they notice patient distress
- new communication and orientation resources, including a dedicated website to help educate family members and to answer common questions

The N.C. Cancer Hospital also integrated notable improvements in 2011, including:

- revising chemotherapy infusion procedures to make treatment more convenient and sensitive to the needs of patients
- introducing new palliative care comfort items, such as handmade blankets, soothing music, soft lighting, and in-room meals for family members

As an extension of the patient advisory boards established at the Children’s Hospital and the Cancer Hospital, UNC Health Care established the system-wide Partnering with Patients and Families committee in early 2011. The committee’s goals are to strengthen its partnership efforts, to provide a resource

of documented collaborative achievements, and to stimulate new partnerships across all departments, disciplines and care settings. The committee includes a diverse mix of system-wide nurse managers, physicians, executives, and patient and family advisors.

“We’ve always strived to put patients and their families at the core of everything we do here at UNC Health Care,” said Brooke Gleason, a family-centered care specialist at N.C. Children’s Hospital, and a co-chair of the Partnering with Patients and Families committee. “Through the creation of the new system-wide Partnering with Patients and Families committee, we’re able to reinforce and broaden this commitment.”

SUPPORTING THE MISSION OF UNC HEALTH CARE

“Our goal at UNC Health Care is to consistently deliver the finest patient care possible. Doing that requires constant, two-way information flow between patients and their families and our health care professionals,” said Meghan McCann, RN, MSN, NE-BC, director of Oncology Nursing Services at the N.C. Cancer Hospital, and co-chair of the Partnering with Patients and Families committee.

“Direct feedback from patients and their families gives our physicians and caregivers the first-hand input and unfettered



The Patient and Family Advisory Board meets with UNC Health Care physicians during a session of Schwartz Rounds.



Raymond Hutchins, cancer survivor, member of the Patient and Family Advisory Board and Loretta Muss, coordinator of the Patient and Family Advisory Board.

perspective necessary to deliver targeted, personalized care, and to ensure a care experience that is mindful of the preferences and expectations of patients and their families,” McCann added.

“When our health care practitioners provide patients and family members with complete, timely and unbiased information, they greatly reduce uncertainty and anxiety. That helps patients and families participate as informed partners in care decisions and become more aware of the options available to them.”

Most market-based and governmental efforts to reform health care regard enhanced communication and relationships with patients and family members as vital to high-quality, patient-centered care. The Institute of Medicine, for instance, cites the importance of bridging gaps between patient and clinician communication in improving clinical outcomes. Additionally, the recently passed federal health care legislation calls for engaging patients in shared decision-

making as a means of reducing demands on the health care system and paring costs.

GATHERING MOMENTUM FOR THE FUTURE

The Partnering with Patients and Families committee is just one example of efforts to incorporate patient- and family-centered care throughout UNC Health Care. Other examples include:

- family Advisory Board established for the newborn critical care center to elicit feedback and recommendations from family members of patients in the unit.
- patient and family partnership program for the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU), which contributes to hospital-wide initiatives relevant to the PICU.
- central patient and family advisory board for the entire N.C. Children’s Hospital is being developed based on the success of the hospital’s other initiatives.
- patient and family Advisory Board at the N.C. Cancer Hospital, which participates in more than 19 committees at the hospital

and has served on 10 panels, presentations, interviews and developing initiatives that will assist patients with a cancer diagnosis and their families and caregivers.

During 2011, the Partnering with Patients and Families committee accomplished important groundwork, which will be valuable in expanding partnership initiatives throughout UNC Health Care in 2012 and the years ahead.

“This is about a culture change,” said Dr. Rosenstein, “and the investment on the part of the hospital—recruiting, eliciting opinions from patients and family members and incorporating them into the operations of the hospital. I think it is transformational. It is not us providing for patients and family members, it is us working together with them to improve the overall patient experience.”