

Improving Patient-Centered Cancer Care in Resource-Limited Settings

Enhancing Cancer Care for Underserved Populations in Sub-Saharan Africa

As a global healthcare company, Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, NJ, USA, known as MSD outside the United States and Canada, is committed to helping reduce the burden of disease around the world and contributing to the United Nations' **Sustainable Development Goals**, especially **SDG 3** — ensuring health and well-being for all. As part of this commitment, our company's Foundation has invested approximately \$50 million since 2015 in innovative programs to enhance access to high-quality care for people living with noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cancer and diabetes.

To help enhance NCD care in resource-limited settings, the Foundation is supporting the **American Cancer Society** (ACS) to improve patient support and access to cancer care in sub-Saharan Africa and develop guidance to help low- and middle-income countries adopt similar models of care. Through a \$2 million grant over five years (2019-2023), the Foundation is helping ACS bring its expertise and experience in patient navigation to new regions with a growing burden of cancer.

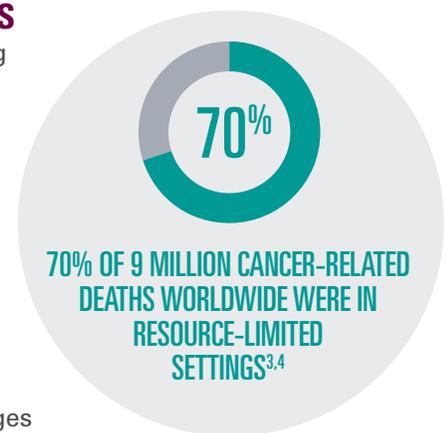
CHALLENGES ACCESSING CANCER CARE IN RESOURCE-LIMITED SETTINGS

Globally, about 1 in 6 people die from cancer,¹ with cancer-related mortality outnumbering deaths from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined.² In resource-limited settings, patients face many barriers in seeking a diagnosis and receiving high-quality care.⁵ Poverty and minimal awareness of cancer are major contributors to poor health outcomes, as are limited patient support services and serious health workforce shortages.⁶ Fragmented health systems – overwhelmed by a double burden of infectious and NCDs – further diminish the likelihood that patients will receive the critical care they need.⁷

PATIENT NAVIGATION PROGRAMS: LINKING PATIENTS TO THE CARE THEY NEED

Patient navigation is an effective way to help cancer patients overcome the many challenges that may affect their care by providing them with individualized assistance. A successful patient navigation program helps ensure timely diagnosis and treatment, increases rates of treatment completion and improves patients' overall quality of life. While navigation for cancer patients has become the standard of care in the United States, it also holds great potential to support cancer patients in other regions, including resource-limited settings.

The cornerstone of patient navigation is the relationship between the navigator and the patient. These patient navigators – whether nurses providing cancer education or lay health workers linking patients to transportation services in the community – play a vital role by supporting patients from the point of diagnosis at a health facility through their treatment journey.



What is a Cancer Patient Navigator?

Navigators work with patients and families to help them overcome the many challenges that may affect care, including:

Providing basic information about cancer and their diagnosis



Explaining treatment and care options



Escorting patients or helping them find their way around a complex hospital campus



Providing comfort to caregivers and family members

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

BRINGING PATIENT NAVIGATION TO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

In 2015, ACS partnered with Kenya's only comprehensive cancer care facility – Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) – to identify the challenges patients face accessing cancer care services at the hospital and introduce patient navigation as a potential solution. In only two years, KNH has already supported more than 4,400 cancer patients with navigation services.

The Foundation's partnership with ACS will continue their patient navigation model in Kenya and bring the tools and resources that have been developed to a high need facility in Uganda – The Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI), which serves about 200 patients daily.

Through this partnership, ACS aims to demonstrate the value of patient navigation in two lower-income country health institutions – a national referral hospital in Kenya and a stand-alone cancer center in Uganda. The goal is to fully integrate these programs into the way each institution delivers cancer care so that patient navigation programs will be sustained.

ACS will develop a comprehensive guide and toolkit to develop and implement patient navigation programs that will help other health facilities in resource-limited settings design customized navigation programs that best serve their patients' needs. Lessons learned from collaborating with KNH and UCI will be incorporated into this guide, which ACS will pilot in health institutions in Asia and Latin America.

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When I learned that I had cancer, I was very scared. After meeting my navigator, Helen, I learned a lot more about cancer and felt encouraged to seek treatment. Helen served as an advisor throughout my difficult journey. Now I'm almost finished with treatment and am deeply grateful for all that the navigation team has done to help me.

39-year-old patient with breast cancer

ADVANCING BEST PRACTICES

ACS will work with an independent evaluator to assess the implementation of the patient navigation programs in Kenya and Uganda as well as the pilot of the program design guide and toolkit. The evaluation team will disseminate its findings to the global cancer community and other relevant stakeholders to advance the field's knowledge of how to effectively support cancer patients in resource-limited settings.

References

¹ World Health Organization. (2018). Cancer Fact Sheet. <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cancer> Accessed February 2019.

² American Cancer Society. (2018). Global Cancer Facts & Figures 4th Edition.

³ Fitzmaurice, C., et al. (2018). **Global, Regional, and National Cancer Incidence, Mortality, Years of Life Lost, Years Lived with Disability, and Disability-Adjusted Life-Years for 29 Cancer Groups, 1990 to 2016: A Systematic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study.** JAMA Oncology: Nov 1;4(11):1553-1568.

⁴ World Health Organization. (2017). Cancer Fact Sheet. <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cancer> Accessed February 2019.

⁵ Sylla, B. S. and Wild, C. P. (2012). **A million Africans a year dying from cancer by 2030: What can cancer research and control offer to the continent?** Int. J. Cancer, 130: 245-250.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Agyepong, I.A., et al. (2017). **“The path to longer and healthier lives for all Africans by 2030: The Lancet Commission on the Future of Health in sub-Saharan Africa.”** The Lancet Journal: 390: 2803-2859.

