

# Improved physician communication for cancer patients

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Pay transparency and diverse representation on hiring committees are first steps to leveling the financial playing field in medicine. Credit: CC0 Public Domain

New research led by Monash University and involving The University of Western Australia, Melbourne University, Peter MacCallum Cancer

Institute, Flinders University, and Eastern Health has highlighted best practice for communication between physicians and cancer patients.

The findings could improve quality of care for [cancer patients](#) who face complex decisions about treatment and symptom management in distressing circumstances.

Effective and sensitive communication between physicians and people living with cancer is essential to facilitate discussions, assist shared decision making and identify individual needs.

Physicians also benefit from positive communication, as breakdowns in communication increase stress, decrease job satisfaction, and contribute to burnout.

Through the [research project](#), UWA Professor of Surgical Oncology Christobel Saunders has been exploring the implementation of quality of life questionnaires into routine cancer care.

"Increased use of communication tools provides an opportunity for physicians to identify areas of unmet need in order to develop new care pathways and services to better support patients," Professor Saunders said.

"We will be capturing clinical and patient-reported outcomes for five cancers—colorectal, breast, lung, prostate, and ovarian, across both public and private hospital settings in Western Australia.

"Early user project feedback, from both patients and clinicians, has shown that using tools to stimulate discussion and capture patient-reported outcomes has helped to raise patient concerns that had not been previously identified or discussed; enabling a full and open discussion between patients and clinicians."

Monash University researchers Dr. Sharon Licqurish, Dr. Olivia Cook and Professor Claire Johnson examined systematic reviews of communication tools across 84 primary studies including tape recordings of consultations, question prompt lists and patient reported outcome measures. They found question prompt lists and patient reported outcome tools were the most effective [physician](#)-patient tools.

"We reviewed an extensive amount of evidence to identify the superior methods that physicians can use to facilitate communication with people living with cancer," Dr. Licqurish said.

"We found that question prompt lists and patient reported outcome tools were the most effective in promoting discussions to assist physicians to identify individual needs and assist decision making and care planning.

"We would like to see physicians using patient reported outcome measures and question prompt lists in [clinical practice](#) to improve communication and therefore benefit people living with cancer."

Tools to facilitate communication during physician-patient consultations in [cancer](#) care: an overview of systematic reviews' is published in *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*.

**More information:** Sharon M. Licqurish et al. Tools to facilitate communication during physician-patient consultations in cancer care: An overview of systematic reviews, *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians* (2019). [DOI: 10.3322/caac.21573](https://doi.org/10.3322/caac.21573)

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