



Oncology Referral Network of America Reports Coordination of Care Among South Florida Oncologists and Island Physicians Increases Quality

Patient Navigation brings Bahamian and Caribbean physicians together.

For Immediate Release

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla./EWorldWire/Sep. 23, 2013 --- With the treatment of cancer a complex undertaking - and with new information being directed at physicians who often cannot keep up, Oncology Referral Network of America (ORNOA) assists physicians treating patients with cancer in The Bahamas and Caribbean, by connecting them with cancer specialists in South Florida.

According to a 315-page report, "Delivering High-Quality Cancer Care: Charting a New Course for a System in Crisis," issued by the Institute of Medicine - National Academy of Sciences, a long list of reasons are examined, among them an increase in cancer diagnosis at a time when there are fewer oncology clinicians in some communities.

The Bahamas and Caribbean Islands are experiencing a shortage of oncologists at a time of greater awareness by the local population as to what constitutes good standard of care.

Oncology Referral Network of America (ORNOA) is the result of efforts to narrow the gap between patients who need care and treatment, to improve the quality of their care.

"An overwhelming majority of second opinions' requests reach us via physicians or from insurance medical directors that want to tap oncology sub-specialists for input on the latest treatment advances," says Maria Freed, an oncology administrator and managing partner of ORNOA. "Core competencies are achieved when the oncologist has expertise in the characteristics of a particular cancer and uses evidence-based treatments."

ORNOA has the ability to tap into a network of private South Florida cancer specialists, including 68 oncologists, hematologists, radiologists, radiation oncologists, and oncology surgeons the service uses to refer cancer cases to. These oncologists use treatment guidelines developed by the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), which covers treatment guidelines for virtually all stages of cancer.

"Many of the oncologists we work with actively participate in clinical trials and belong to large cancer networks such as U.S. Oncology and 21st Century Oncology, which have strong educational arms to keep their members abreast of new treatment developments. These large networks not only offer multidisciplinary trials but also state-of-the-art techniques for treatment, with special emphasis on organ preservation, shorter treatment regimens, focusing on quality of life issues," says Dr. Eduardo Fernandez, senior vice president of medical affairs and medical director for Latin America for 21st Century Oncology.

Lack of communication between physicians was one of the challenges reported in the Institute of Medicine Report, presenting a hindrance to good care for cancer patients. ORNOA facilitates the coordination of information between the islands' treating physicians and oncology specialists in South Florida.

Requests for specialists' evaluation typically start with a review of patients' medical records, followed by a phone call or email exchange between doctors so that the status of the case is fully understood. Complex cases are often discussed at tumor board meetings at South Florida Hospitals. If physicians determine the case needs a test, procedure or treatment not found on-island, only then do doctors recommend patients travel to get specialty care.

Once a treatment plan is established, and it has been determined the treatment is well tolerated, patients can return home to continue chemotherapy closer to home.

An example of coordinated cancer care is the use of PET-CT imaging equipment which is not available in The Bahamas or other Caribbean islands.

"PET-CT imaging in oncology plays an increasingly important role in assessing the patients' stage of cancer and, afterwards, their response to treatment. This technology enables us to have earlier disease detection, as well as more accurate diagnosis, which all leads to better treatment decisions for the patient," states Dr. Michael Fagien, radiologist and medical director at Impression Imaging, a center in Tamarac, Fla., that works closely with referring oncologists from the islands.

Besides better outcomes, there are real savings when clinicians work together, leading insurance companies to tap into the South Florida private physician practices. Coordinating oncology medical services for Morgan White Administrators International Inc. clients has evolved into a vital part of ORNOA-Patient Navigators operations.

"By working closely with top line oncologists from South Florida, our clients gain access to the best cancer care, with enhanced opportunities for a better outcome, client/family satisfaction and cost management," states Dr. Roger Asencio, chief underwriter for Morgan White, which serves clients in the Bahamas, Caribbean and Central America.

"South Florida physicians have made a significance impact on the quality of oncology care for many patients. Having guided over 1,300 cancer cases in the last 3 years, we now have sufficient data to show that patients seeking sound cancer treatments do not necessarily have to travel to big academic centers in the United States. We have the expertise right here in South Florida and, working closer with referring physicians is the key to maintaining high quality and good outcomes," adds Freed.

One area identified in the report that has not been fully developed is palliative care. In the islands, just as in many regions of the U.S., there is a shortage of palliative care consultants. Open discussions on end-of-life choices, pain reduction, and managing expectations can be difficult. There are hospice programs in many Caribbean islands, often run by charitable organizations, and these are typically under-funded.

"I think all of us could be doing significantly more to create greater awareness of the benefits of hospice care. This is an area ORNOA anticipates expanding into. I am optimistic that collectively we can make it happen, because we work with so many talented colleagues here and abroad that believe in compassionate cancer care," shared Shelly Weiss, patient navigator and managing partner at ORNOA.

To learn more about the services of ORNOA-Patient Navigators, visit <http://www.ornoa.com>.

MEDIA: To arrange for interviews or commentary, contact Maria Freed at 954-965-7002

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