

Getting Integrated Cancer Care

by Christine Carpenter

A recent Institute of Medicine* report stated, “Cancer care today often provides state-of-the-science medical treatment, but fails to address the psychological and social (psychosocial) problems associated with cancer. This failure can compromise the effectiveness of health care and thereby adversely affect the health of cancer patients.”

Psychological and social problems created or made worse by cancer include the following:

- depression, anxiety, and other emotional problems
- lack of information or skills needed to manage the illness
- lack of transportation or other resources
- disruptions in work, school, and family life.

When these psychosocial issues are not provided for, it causes patients additional suffering, weakens the ability to follow prescribed treatments, and threatens patients' return to health.

Today, a range of services are available to help patients and their families manage the psychosocial aspects of cancer. These services are often called “integrated cancer care,” “comprehensive cancer care,” or “community support services.”

We now know it is impossible to deliver good-quality cancer care without addressing patients' **medical health** needs *and* patients' **psychosocial health** needs.

All patients with cancer and their families should expect and receive cancer care that provides the following:

- counseling from a trained professional
- discharge planning
- nutritional support

- pastoral care
- patient education and support
- family education and support
- health and wellness education and support
- hospice care, if needed.

Being Treated as a Whole Person

You often have a choice about your cancer care provider. Ask your doctor or surgeon to refer you to a Commission on Cancer accredited cancer program that provides comprehensive cancer care. If you are already receiving cancer care, ask your physician how he/she plans to provide you with the above psychosocial services that are proven to be so important for positive health outcomes. Remember, your health care system must treat you as a whole person, not just a disease.

* The Institute of Medicine (IOM) is an independent, nonprofit organization that works outside of government to provide unbiased and authoritative advice to decision makers and the public. The Institute of Medicine serves as adviser to the nation to improve health.