

ACS Cancer Conference 2025

March 12-14 | Phoenix, AZ

Addressing Financial Toxicity and Health Inequities: A Collaborative Approach to Enhancing Patient Care

Andrea Kliss, MA, CPPS, CPHQ

Network Quality Director

Trista Leong, MA, RHIT, CHDA, ODS-C

Nuvance Health



Disclosures

- No disclosures



© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

ACS Cancer Conference 2025 | March 12-14 | Phoenix, AZ

ACS Cancer Programs
American College of Surgeons

Learning Objectives

1. **Development and Structure:** Establish and organize a collaborative conference that includes diverse departments and specialties
2. **Case Review Process:** Selecting and presenting patient cases related to health equity barriers and financial issues
3. **Solution Identification:** Strategies for identifying and implementing local and regional resources, financial solutions, and broader system changes
4. **Evaluation:** Methods for tracking progress and reporting results to ensure continuous improvement and accountability.

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

Rationale for Financial Toxicity Conference

“We need to talk about financial toxicity in the same way we talk about other side effects of treatment. When you document a side effect of treatment, you have an obligation to treat it. The same is true of financial toxicity.” Alan Balch, National Patient Advocate Foundation

- Prevalence of Financial Toxicity: A significant percentage of cancer patients experience financial toxicity, with studies showing that 30-40% patients report financial strain.
- Impact on treatment decisions: Financial concerns often influence treatment choices, leading some patients to delay, reduce or abandon treatments altogether due to cost burdens
- Out-of-pocket costs: Co-pays, out-of-network bills, out-of-pocket, travel, time off work
- Psychosocial effects: Worry about money, affordability
- Disparities in Financial Toxicity: low-income, uninsured, or underinsured populations are disproportionately affected by financial toxicity, often facing greater challenges
- Long-term financial impact

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

ACS Cancer Conference 2025 | March 12-14 | Phoenix, AZ



ACS Cancer Programs
American College of Surgeons

Nuvance Health Financial Toxicity and Health Inequity Case Conference Review

- Problem Statement: Financial toxicity and health inequity significantly impact patient outcomes and access to care.
- Baseline Data: Conference was developed in response to trends identified in data regarding social determinants of health.
 - Data used include: Rate of self-pay throughout system, stage by ethnicity and zip code, insurance status by zip and ethnicity, community and social needs assessment, social worker and navigators request
- Goal: Address barriers through a structured, collaborative approach.

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

Financial Toxicity and Inequity Case Conference Development

Stakeholder Assessment

- Create buy-in and commitment from leaders
- Leaders included Chair, Vice President, Division Chiefs, Case Management, Billing, Authorization, Finance, and Navigation

Development

- Charter developed and distributed for review
- Educational sessions occur twice a year for committee
- Team identified and communicated with prior to meeting establishment
- Owners and responsible staff identified

Structure

- Established bi-monthly standing meetings
- Operates similar to a Tumor Board. Tumor board staff maintain invite and attendance
- Quality Director facilitates meeting and follow-up
- Relevant experts provide educational sessions

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

Case Review

Submission

- Case request 2 weeks in advance
- Cases selected based on patients experiencing health equity barriers, access issues, or treatment challenges, particularly those underinsured.
- Case sent to billing team for pre-review for relevant information

Presentation

- Power point template includes history, disparities assessment, relevant treatment, current patient needs, interventions to date

Action

- Ideas for improvement or system changes escalated to leadership

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

Themes Identified in Conference

- Medicaid and QMB Issues: Difficulties accessing and navigating Medicaid and Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) programs
- Transportation Barriers: Challenges with transportation to treatment and care appointments even with vouchers and American Cancer Society.
- Undocumented Patients: Issues with undocumented patients applying for charity care and accessing services
- Fertility Preservation Coverage
- Lack of home social support
- Patients cancelling appointments due to out-of-pocket costs
- Ability to pay for utility/bills
- Prior authorization problems with specific payors

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

Collaborative Problem-Solving Approach

- Case Presentation: Each conference featured a case presented by key staff such as navigator, social worker, or financial navigator.
- Team Discussions: The multidisciplinary team (Directors, physicians, billing, prior authorization, navigators) collaborated to discuss each case.
- Brainstorming Solutions: Open brainstorming sessions to generate created solutions and approaches for addressing patient challenges.
- Identifying Actionable Steps: The team focused on practical ideas to improve care and address barriers
- Real-time problem solving: Dynamic, real-time discussion to ensure the best outcome for patients facing financial and healthcare barriers.

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

Evaluation

- Minutes taken for each meeting are sent to team
- Improvement ideas, recommendations, and resources shared are sent to team as a follow-up.
- Updates to system-wide or strategic change recommendations are shared at each meeting. Examples:
 - Payor contracting negotiation or discussions
 - New community relationships
 - Hiring status of support staff
 - Bridging communication gaps between department leaders
 - Referral process improvement

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

Persistent Barriers: Key Takeaways

- **Persistent Transportation Barriers:** Rural areas continue to face significant challenges with transportation, impacting access to care.
- **Social Isolation and Lack of Support:** Many patients experience social isolation and a lack of social support, which exacerbates their health challenges.
- **Hardships for Undocumented Patients:** Undocumented patients face extreme financial hardships and are often ineligible for grants and other forms of assistance.

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.

Conclusion

- The conference has proven to be an invaluable platform for addressing financial, socio-economic disparities, and access-related challenges.
- Critical areas of concern are addressed and receive advocacy efforts.
- Educational sessions enriched the discourse, equipping attendees with practical tools to tackle these issues.
- Continued refinement and expansion of this collaborative approach are expected to enhance patient outcomes and healthcare equity.

© American College of Surgeons. Content cannot be reproduced or repurposed without written permission of the American College of Surgeons.