

2026 AHNS Cancer Prevention Community Service Award Application

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Background

Receiving a cancer diagnosis is one of the most stressful events of a patient's life. The months and years that follow require extensive, longitudinal counseling from a multidisciplinary team of physicians. From the perspective of a head and neck cancer surgeon, diagnosing a patient with a new cancer while providing them with concise, accurate, and sufficiently descriptive information about their treatment plan represents a unique challenge. Many patients require complex and time-sensitive surgeries, such as free tissue transfer, that carry significant emotional and functional consequences.

Research shows that patients who feel informed experience lower levels of anxiety and depression throughout their cancer treatment¹. One cross-sectional study from 2018 found that patients most strongly preferred in-office teaching followed by pamphlets or other educational materials². A major advantage to written materials is the patients can select which sections to review and have a centralized document to collect information and write down questions as they arise.

Our project aims to help improve perioperative counseling for head and neck cancer patients through creating a head and neck cancer handbook. This resource will provide patients with information about their diagnosis and surgical treatment options, room to collect and store materials from other physicians on their care team, and patient testimonials. The aim is to create a resource to center patients through their multidisciplinary cancer journey that could be easily replicated and individualized at other institutions. This project also addresses cancer prevention via improved health literacy, including recognition of concerning symptoms and HPV education for patients and their families. Longer term goals of this project include prospectively studying the impact of this booklet on patient comfort and health literacy through a study-specific questionnaire.

Target Population

Newly diagnosed head and neck cancer patients undergoing surgical treatment (with or without neoadjuvant or adjuvant therapy) at the University of Michigan.

Methods

We are updating and expanding upon a previously developed but unpublished head and neck cancer handbook created at our institution. After the final version is complete and reviewed by a team of head and neck cancer surgeons, medical oncologists, and radiation oncologists, we will print this booklet to offer to all patients newly diagnosed with head and neck cancer who are seen by our head and neck cancer surgeons. In addition to our clinic nurses highlighting relevant sections at patients' new cancer visits, we will have the booklet contain a folder or other space for papers, a section for questions, and a section for patient testimonials to provide additional peer to peer counseling through the perioperative process.

Expected Outcome and Impact

We anticipate that this resource will help reduce some of the cognitive overload of the early stages of diagnosis and treatment and help patients better understand their care and participate more actively in clinical decision-making.

Regarding primary head and neck cancer prevention, we include information for patients' families about the spread and prevention of HPV infection. Survey data published by our department found that a significant portion of the approximately 1000 participants were not aware that HPV can cause head and neck cancer³. Thus, this head and neck cancer handbook represents an important resource that patients can share with their friends and families.

The primary goal of this handbook is to support secondary and tertiary prevention of head and neck cancer. We expect that possession of this booklet will improve the health literacy of our patient population, encourage timely reporting of concerning symptoms suggestive of recurrence, and mitigate the physical and emotional effects of cancer treatment. In the long term, we will aim to study how our booklet improves perioperative counseling for patients.

Estimated Cost

Printing and binding of patient handbooks 100 copies: \$600

- Interior printing cost (\$2.00-\$3.50 per booklet)
- Cover (\$1.00 per booklet)

Organizational materials (folders, inserts): \$300

- Two pocket folder (\$1.00-\$1.50 each)
- Divider tabs (\$0.50-\$1.00)
- Clear sleeve for business cards (\$0.25-\$0.50)

Educational inserts and supplies: \$100

Total estimated cost: \$1,000

No additional funding has been secured for this project

Citations

¹ Llewellyn CD, McGurk M, Weinman J. How satisfied are head and neck cancer (HNC) patients with the information they receive pre-treatment? Results from the satisfaction with cancer information profile (SCIP). *Oral Oncol.* 2006;42(7):726-734. doi:10.1016/j.oraloncology.2005.11.013

² Papadakos J, McQuestion M, Gokhale A, et al. Informational Needs of Head and Neck Cancer Patients. *J Cancer Educ.* 2018;33(4):847-856. doi:10.1007/s13187-017-1176-9

³ Dermody SM, Walline H, Bhambhani C, et al. Addressing knowledge gaps in HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer prevention: A call for action. *Oral Oncol.* 2025;163:107234. doi:10.1016/j.oraloncology.2025.107234