

Supportive care needs of people with cancer and their families

A model for supportive care provision in Victoria

What is supportive care?

‘Supportive care is an ‘umbrella’ term for all services, both generalist and specialist, that may be required to support people with cancer and their carers’.¹ It includes self-help and support, information, psychological support, symptom control, social support, rehabilitation, spiritual support, palliative care and bereavement care.¹

In the context of cancer, supportive care needs include:

- Physical needs
- Psychological needs
- Social needs
- Information needs
- Spiritual needs.

Why is it important?

The provision of psychosocial and supportive care for people diagnosed and treated for cancer, and their carer/ family is an integral component of evidence based best practice clinical care. Research shows that people with cancer receiving education and psychosocial interventions have lower rates of anxiety, mood disorders, nausea, vomiting and pain, and significantly greater knowledge about the disease and treatment².

Who provides supportive care?

To meet needs across all domains of supportive care in the context of cancer, supportive care needs are provided by generalist and specialist health services as well as community services. All members of the multidisciplinary team have a role in the provision of supportive care. In addition support from family, friends, support groups, volunteers and other community-based organisations make an important contribution to supportive care.

What is happening in Victoria to improve the provision of supportive care?

A *Cancer Services Framework for Victoria*³ recommended that tumour streams be developed to reduce unwanted variation in practice. In response, Patient Management Frameworks⁴ (PMFs) have been developed to provide a consistent statewide approach to care management in each tumour stream to ensure patients with cancer and their families receive optimal care and support.

Supportive care is required across all steps of the patient journey as identified in the PMFs. Additional tumour specific supportive care needs are outlined in each tumour site specific PMF.

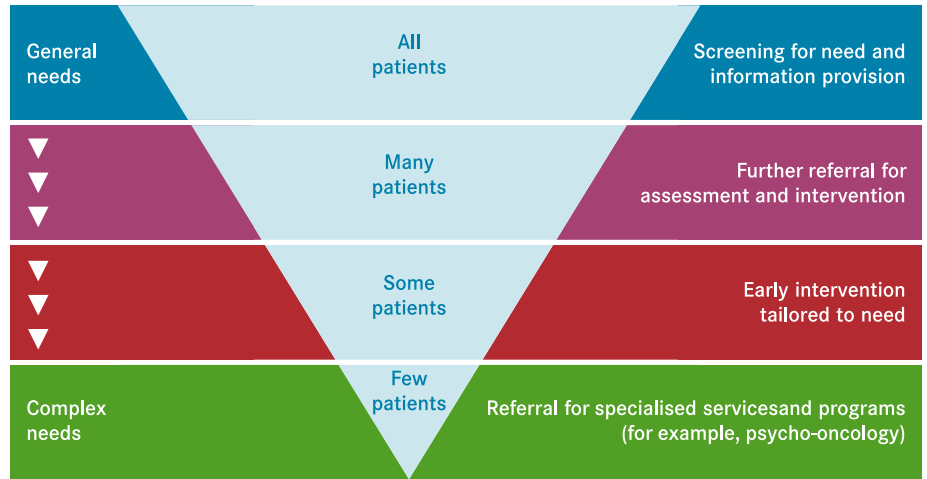
An important step in the provision of supportive care services is to identify, by routine and systematic questioning of the patient and family, views on issues they require help with for optimal health and quality of life outcomes⁵.

The supportive care model articulated in the PMFs recognises the variety and level of intervention required at each critical point as well as the need to be specific to the individual. The model (Figure 1) targets the type and level of intervention required to meet patients supportive care needs. While there needs to be provision of general information to all patients, only a few will require specialised intervention.

Figure 1: Victoria's supportive care model

As supportive care is provided by a range of services throughout the patient journey, the following strategic directions are guiding the development and implementation of strategies at the Integrated Cancer Services (ICS) and statewide levels to ensure cancer patients have access to supportive care:

1. Processes that assist in the identification of patient, family and carer supportive care needs
2. Clear referral pathways to specialised supportive care services
3. Adequate staff training in identifying and responding to supportive care needs
4. Promotion of supportive care as an important element of cancer service delivery.



(Adapted from Fitch⁶. Reproduced with kind permission from Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre)

1 National Institute for Clinical Excellence, 2004, *Guidance on Cancer Services – Improving Supportive and Palliative Care for Adults with Cancer. The Manual*, National Health Service, London, United Kingdom.

2 National Breast Cancer Centre and National Cancer Control Initiative. 2003. *Clinical practice guidelines for the psychosocial care of adults with cancer*. National Breast Cancer Centre, Camperdown, NSW.

3 The Collaboration for Cancer Outcomes Research and Evaluation, 2003, 'A Cancer Services Framework for Victoria', CCORE, Melbourne.

4 Department of Human Services, 2006. www.health.vic.gov.au/cancer

5 Foot, G & Sanson-Fisher, R, 1995 'Measuring the unmet needs of people living with cancer', *Cancer Forum*, Volume 19, No. 2: 131-135.

6 Fitch, M. 2000, 'Supportive care for cancer patients'. *Hospital Quarterly*. Volume 3, No. 4: 39-46.