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Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice

Interview

In the PaLRaP Spotlight: Tanya Fischer, MEd, MSLIS (she/her)

Medical Writer, Patient Information

National Comprehensive Cancer Network® (NCCN®) – Plymouth Meeting, PA

Interview by Stephanie Campbell

Stephanie Campbell is Library Acquisitions & Outreach Specialist at Pennsylvania College of Technology, sac4@pct.edu

Tell us a little about yourself, your career trajectory, what led you to librarianship, and specifically medical librarianship?

I really expected to be a public librarian. I was - and still am - excited by how public libraries build social capital. But sometimes you can't predict the path your career will take. I spent many years as a self-employed artist (with art on the television series *Black-ish* and *Big Bang Theory* among others) and as an adjunct professor at two community colleges in Arizona. Then, after five years in Pennsylvania public libraries, I pursued an MSLIS and participated in ILEAD USA in order to advance my library career. After completing my degree, I took a patient education consultant position at a local hospital in their Department of Education. Since the patient education team fell under library services, I also worked in the medical library. I wrote and reviewed in-patient education materials including patient handouts, videos for the patient channel, and other media, while creating LibGuides and conducting literature searches for the medical library. I have been a medical writer for patient information at National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) for three years. At NCCN, I write, review, and consult on NCCN Guidelines for Patients®, Know What Your Doctors Know patient webinars, animations, and other NCCN products.

According to the NCCN website[1], the National Comprehensive Cancer Network is a not-for-profit alliance of leading cancer centers who share information and expertise to improve cancer care for patients and practitioners worldwide. Please explain your role.

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) is an alliance of 32 leading cancer centers devoted to patient care, research, and education. Its core resource, NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology®, are the standard for cancer care. Clinical practice guidelines are decision tools created by multidisciplinary teams of experts from across NCCN Member Institutions to determine the best way to treat a patient, depending on their diagnosis, disease stage, and other factors, such as age. NCCN Guidelines for Patients are the patient-friendly versions of these guidelines. We currently have over 60 books in our library, plus animations, webinars, and numerous translations.

My role as a patient information medical writer is to take an NCCN Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) and write a new or update an existing NCCN patient guideline based on the treatment pathways or algorithms found within the CPG. The NCCN Guidelines for Patients are based on the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines). They explain the same options for cancer care but are written in plain language using health literacy and numeracy principles and apply Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) design principles. Every patient book contains a chapter on shared decision-making with "Questions to Ask Your Doctor." Images and illustrations reflect a diverse range of races, ages, and ethnicities. Gender-neutral and age-sensitive language is used throughout.

NCCN Guidelines are the standard of cancer care and basis for insurance coverage in the United States. They are the most thorough and most frequently updated clinical practice guidelines available in any area of medicine and are used worldwide. We currently have 83 CPGs featuring 218 algorithms that apply to 97% of cancer cases in the United States.

Do you have a physical library location or is it strictly online? What kind of resources to you provide?

We do not have a physical library. All of our resources are available free online through our website (NCCN.org) or our mobile apps (NCCN.org/guidelines/nccn-mobile-app).

Access to the clinical practice guidelines requires registration, but this information is only used to track global downloads. No registration is needed to access the patient resources (NCCN.org/patients).

A selection of NCCN resources include:

- ✓ NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines)
- ✓ NCCN Drugs & Biologics Compendium (NCCN Compendium®)
- ✓ NCCN Biomarkers Compendium®
- ✓ NCCN Chemotherapy Order Templates (NCCN Templates®)
- ✓ International Adaptations & Translations of the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology

- ✓ NCCN Framework for Resource Stratification of NCCN Guidelines (NCCN Framework™)
- ✓ NCCN Harmonized Guidelines™
- ✓ NCCN Radiation Therapy Compendium™
- ✓ *JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network*
- ✓ NCCN Guidelines for Patients

Describe, from your perspective, a typical day-in-the-life of a medical librarian.

A typical day is spent writing about cancer – helping those with cancer understand their disease, prepare for testing and treatment, and engage in shared decision-making. The process starts with attending panel meetings and learning the disease, how it is diagnosed and treated. Currently, I am updating the breast cancer series which includes ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS), invasive and inflammatory breast cancer, and metastatic breast cancer (MBC). All three books are in various stages of development. DCIS is in copyediting, invasive is in final layout, and MBC is in medical review. While working on MBC, I moderated a kidney cancer patient webinar and attended weekly animation meetings to review script and storyboard edits for new MBC animations.

Finally, can you tell us why you do what you do?

I do what I do because I think every person has the right to the best care after receiving a cancer diagnosis. Everyone with cancer should have access to the evidence-based information regarding the preferred standard of care for their specific subtype of cancer. Information is power. Having this information ensures that no matter where you are being treated, you are getting the best care. A person with cancer should know what to expect from treatment, understand the likely course their cancer will take, advocate for the treatment options that will ensure the best quality and quantity of life, and engage in share decision-making with their care team. And as information professionals, it is our responsibility to contribute by providing access to these free, authoritative cancer resources to our communities.

NCCN Guidelines for Patients can be added to any ILS. Feel free to contact Tanya at fischer@nccn.org for more information.

Notes

[1] https://www.nccn.org/home/about