Cancer Information for Patients
Acknowledgments
This flip chart was prepared by the Johns Hopkins Centre for Communication Programs and Qayana Communication PLC in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health in Ethiopia and with support from the American Cancer Society. Representatives from cancer organisations in Ethiopia provided technical guidance and designed the booklet content based on qualitative research among cancer patients and their caregivers. The content in the flip chart is an adaptation from materials prepared by the American Cancer Society. Some limited content was adapted from MacMillan Cancer Support, and the U.S. National Cancer Institute. MADO Communication PLC was responsible for graphic design and illustrations.

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How to Use this Flipchart
This flipchart will help you counsel patients about cancer. It is divided into four chapters:
Chapter 1: Diagnosis
Chapter 2: Basic Facts About Cancer
Chapter 3: Treatment
Chapter 4: Coping

You can pick and choose which chapters to use depending on the patient’s situation and needs. There are instructions at the beginning of each chapter to guide you.

If you know the patient’s diagnosis, then start with Chapter 1: Diagnosis.

If you are talking with patients and do not know their diagnosis, then start with Chapter 2. What is cancer?

How to Counsel Patients
Respect each patient. All patients deserve your respect no matter their age, economic status, marital status, ethnic group, or sexual and reproductive health behavior.

Treat each patient equally. All patients need to know the facts about their situation. Even patients who are not literate can understand information if you take a little time to explain.

Interact. Ask questions and respond to each patient to learn about his or her needs, concerns, and specific situation. Encourage patients and their family members to ask questions.

Speak in a language the patient understands. Use simple words and speak in the language the patient is comfortable with.

Use illustrations and pictures to explain. The illustrations in the job aid can help patients learn and remember information.

Give the right amount of information. Help patients make informed choices but do not overwhelm them with information.

Help patients remember instructions. Ask patients to repeat important instructions to be sure they understand and remember; give them written instructions to take with them.

“That is what we need the most, we need to learn how to counsel and how to educate patients.”

Health Worker
Chapter 1: Diagnosis

This chapter should be used when you know the patient’s diagnosis to ensure that they have information about their health status.

Greeting the patient

Greet the patient and acknowledge the difficulty of their situation. Acknowledge also any pain or suffering. Reassure them that you are ready to help them in whatever way possible and to answer any questions they may have.
What kind of cancer do I have?

Let the patient know you will be discussing some serious information with them. If the patient has a form of cancer that cannot be treated, prepare them by saying, ‘Unfortunately, I have very difficult information to give to you today.’ Be honest, but gentle, in explaining the following:

- The type of cancer you have is called __________.
- What’s important about cancer is what stage it is – how much it has spread in the body.
- Your cancer is at stage __________. This means that __________.

**Stage 1 and 2:** The cancer is just in one part of your body and we should be able to treat and possibly even cure the cancer.

OR

**Stage 3:** The cancer is starting to spread to other parts of your body. It is harder to treat because it has started to spread, but there are treatments that can help slow or stop the spread of the cancer.

OR

**Stage 4:** The cancer has spread to many places in your body. I’m sorry to say this, but it is very difficult to treat cancer after it has spread throughout the body.
What treatment will I have?

Acknowledge that the patient is feeling a lot of emotions right now. Give them as much time as you can to absorb the information. Ask if they are ready to talk about next steps. If so, then see the information below.

If the cancer is treatable, let the patient know:
- There are several options to treat this type of cancer. The doctor feels the best option to treat your cancer is _______________.
- The goal of this cancer treatment will be to _______________.

If the cancer is not treatable, let the patient know:
- Unfortunately the cancer is very difficult to treat with available treatment options.
- However, there are options available to help you feel comfortable. These include _______________.
- Our goal is to make you as comfortable and pain-free as possible.
NORMAL CELL

CANCER CELL

DOUBLING

MALIGNANT TUMOUR
What is cancer?

Let the patient know:
- Our body is made up of millions of tiny cells. All of these cells have a job to do in keeping us healthy and whole.
- When normal cells are worn out or damaged, they die and are replaced with new cells.
- Cancer is a disease in which cells are not normal. Cancer cells do not die. They continue to grow and divide until there are too many.
- These cells crowd out normal cells. This causes problems in the part of the body where the cancer started.
What types of cancer are there?

Let the patient know:

- There are many types of cancer in Ethiopia, the ones shown are the most common types found in the country.
- Cancers are named for where they start. Cancer can start in any part of the body: the breast, intestines, liver, reproductive organs, or even in the blood.
- Cancer cells can also spread to other parts of the body and cause problems there. This is called metastasis.
- For instance, cancer cells in the lung can travel to the bones and grow there. But it’s still called lung cancer. Cancers are named for where they start, not where they end up.
- Some cancers grow and spread very quickly. Others grow more slowly.
Who gets cancer?

Let the patient know:

- Anyone can get cancer regardless of their age, where they live, or how much wealth they have.
- Even though cancer can happen at any age, it is more common as we grow older.
- There are “risk factors” that may increase one’s chance of getting cancer, but they do not cause cancer in every person. Some common risk factors are:
  - Having HIV or other infections
  - Breathing in tobacco smoke (even if you are not the one smoking)
  - Being overweight
  - Cancer in a parent or sibling
- But there is no single cause of cancer. Even people without any risk factors can get cancer.
Why me?

Let the patient know:

– People with cancer often ask, “Why me?” “What did I do wrong to get cancer?”
– Cancer is a disease that can affect anyone, anywhere, in any country, at any time.
– Cancer is not a punishment for your past actions.
Let the patient know:

– Some cancers, such as breast and cervical cancer can run in families. So if a parent or sibling has had this cancer, then a person may be more likely to develop this cancer someday.

– But cancer isn’t passed on from parent to child the same way that height is.

– Cancer also cannot be passed from mother to child in the same way as HIV.
Is cancer contagious?

Let the patient know:
- Many people worry that they will get cancer from being around someone who has it. But cancer is not contagious. Cancer does not spread from one person to another.
- It is completely safe for family and friends to visit, eat, and live with a person who has cancer.
Let the patient know:

Before deciding upon a treatment plan, your doctor may order tests such as a biopsy, x-ray, CT scan or blood tests to find out what kind of cancer you have.

These tests also help the doctor find out what ‘stage’ of cancer you have.

What kind of cancer do I have?
STAGE 0
Carcinoma in situ - early form.

STAGE 1
Cancer is only located in one organ.

STAGE 2
The tumour is growing in size, but localized.

STAGE 3
The cancer has spread to lymph nodes and possibly neighbouring tissues.

STAGE 4
Cancer has spread to other parts of the body. It is the most advanced stage.
Let the patient know:
Staging is the process of finding out how much cancer there is and how far it has spread in the body. There are four stages of cancer.

- Stage 1 or 2 means that the cancer has not spread to other parts of the body, and can more easily be treated.
- Stage 3 means it has begun spreading, and will be more difficult to treat.
- Stage 4 is the highest stage. It means that the cancer has spread to other parts of the body and will be more difficult to cure.

Knowing the stage of your cancer allows your doctor to decide on the best treatment plan for you.
Cancer Treatment Centres

Currently Operational
Mekelle
Gondar
Addis Ababa
Jimma
Hawassa
Harer

Future Plan

Let the patient know:
- Cancer treatment is only available at a few places in Ethiopia. Therefore, patients wait a long time to get an appointment.
- Having the necessary checkups and planning cancer treatment takes time.
- Cancer treatment can last a long time—from months to years.
- If you are not able to pay for treatment services you should get a poverty certificate from the kebele of your residence so you qualify for free services.
How is cancer treated?

Let the patient know:

– There are four main types of cancer treatment: surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormonal therapy.
– These treatments can be used alone or in combination with each other.
– Treatment can be used for many different reasons. Sometimes it can cure the disease. Other times it can help slow the spread of cancer in the body. The goal of treatment depends on how severe the cancer is.
– Even if the cancer cannot be treated, there are treatments and medication that can help lessen the pain and make patients comfortable.
What is cancer surgery?

Let the patient know:
- Many people with cancer have surgery.
- Surgery is most effective for cancers that have not spread to other areas.
- Sometimes it’s hard to tell how much surgery is needed until the surgeon sees the extent to which the cancer has spread during the operation.
- Surgery may be used to cure the cancer or to treat problems caused by cancer, such as taking out a tumour that’s blocking the intestine.
- Do you have questions about surgery?
What is chemotherapy?

Let the patient know:

– CHEMO (short for chemotherapy) is the drug(s) used to kill cancer cells or slow their growth. It is given by injection or swallowed in pills.
– In most cases, more than one chemo is used.
– Chemo can treat cancers that have spread throughout the body because it travels through the bloodstream.
– Chemo is given for many reasons depending on the type of cancer and its stage. Sometimes it can cure cancer. If a cure is not possible, it may be given to slow the growth of cancer, help make the patient more comfortable, or shrink a tumour before surgery.
– Do you have questions about your chemotherapy?
How do I register for chemotherapy?

Let the patient know:

- Once the doctor has prescribed chemo for you, you will be put into a queue based on the date of your prescription.
- Chemo patients are admitted for inpatient services every _____ and ______ days. You have to come on those days to ensure you retain your queue for inpatient beds.
- People who already have started their chemo cycles are prioritized over new patients.
- Due to the shortage of beds, it takes 2-3 months to get a bed.
- You should plan for shelter, medical expenses, and food in Addis during that time.
- If you have a lot of pain or ongoing bleeding, go to the referral hospital for emergency treatment.
What is radiotherapy?

Let the patient know:

- Radiotherapy is the use of radiation to treat cancer.
- Radiation is used to treat localized cancers as well as those that have spread to other body parts such as bones, brain, liver, spinal cord, and tumours that block the airway of the lungs.
- Radiotherapy may be used to cure cancer, or slow the growth of cancer. It can also be used to treat symptoms of cancer.
- Radiation is given two ways:
  - **External radiation:** Special equipment sends high doses of radiation to kill cancer cells. It is not painful.
  - **Radiation implants:** Small containers of radiation are placed inside the body in or near the tumour.
- Radiation can also affect normal cells near the cancer cells. But normal cells can repair themselves and cancer cells cannot.
- Do you have questions about your radiotherapy?

How do I register for radiation therapy?

Let the patient know:

- You will go to the radiation therapy unit and give the prescription the doctor gave you at the information desk.
- There they will put you in a queue and ask you for your phone number so they can call you when they reach your turn in the queue.
- The queue can take from six months up to a year or more.
How do I register for hormonal therapy?

Let the patient know:
- Different types of pills or injections are used for hormonal therapy.
- Usually hormonal therapy is given as an out-patient and the doctor will prescribe the medication you need.
- The doctor will make a follow up appointment to check your progress.
Does treatment have side effects?

Let the patient know:

- Chemotherapy and radiotherapy can have side effects.
- Most side effects go away after treatment ends.
- Common side effects of radiation and chemotherapy are nausea and vomiting, temporary hair loss, fatigue, and rashes.
- We will help you find ways to cope with side effects during treatment.
- Make sure to ask the nurse or doctor about specific side effects you feel once you have started treatment.
Let the patient know:

- A major life change like cancer can affect how we act toward others.
- It is common to feel angry and frustrated. Sometimes, we take those feelings out on people we love the most. Our family members may be hurt and confused by this.
- We may also find that family members treat us differently. They may feel resentment toward us because we can’t work as much as we used to. Or they may not want to spend as much time with us. This can happen even in the most loving families.
- Though it is hard to do, it is important to talk about these issues. Share your fears, feelings of guilt, or frustration with family members in a calm and honest manner. It will help reduce your stress and let them know what is behind your words and actions.

Ask the patient if they are noticing any changes in how they interact with others. Help them to describe their feelings and think of ways to discuss with friends and family members.
How can I cope with cancer?

Let the patient know:

As difficult as cancer is, there are ways to cope. These include:

- Learn as much as you can about your cancer.
- Express your feelings. Hiding your sadness, fear or anger will hurt you more. You might try talking with trusted friends or relatives, keeping a private journal, listening to music, painting, or drawing.
- Take care of yourself. Do something you enjoy every day. Eat your favorite meal, spend time with a friend or loved one, watch a movie, meditate, go to a place of worship, listen to your favorite music, or do something else you really enjoy.
How can I cope with cancer?

Let the patient know:

- **Exercise.** If your doctor agrees that it’s ok. Start a mild exercise program such as walking or stretching. Exercise can help you feel better.

- **Talk to a friend.** It’s very hard for any one person to handle having cancer all alone. Reach out to friends, family, or support organisations. They can help you feel less alone.

- **Focus on what you can control, not what you cannot.**

Ask patients if they can think of other ways that would help them relax.
Protein

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Carbohydrates

Fats and Oils

Water
What can I eat?

Let the patient know:

- It is usually safe to eat any food that is cooked properly and prepared with good hygiene.
- It’s very important to eat a balanced diet. Eat food each day from each of the main groups:
  - Protein such as shiro, lentils, beans, eggs, milk, meat, chicken, and fish
  - Carbohydrates such as injera, potatoes, corn, wheat
  - Fruits & vegetables such as tomatoes, kale, salads, oranges, bananas, and papaya
- Try to eat a variety of foods, not the same ones every day.
- Many people feel better eating smaller meals throughout the day instead of three large meals.
- Try to drink at least 8 glasses of water every day. Avoid alcohol, cigarettes and khat.
- Try to limit the amount of salt, sugar, and oils/fats that you eat.
- Make sure to wash your hands after using the latrine and before preparing and eating foods.
How will I tell family members and friends?

Ask if the patient have specific fears or concerns about telling others about their cancer. Try to respond to concerns by sharing from some of the key points below:

- Cancer can happen to anyone. It is nothing you brought upon yourself and it is not your fault.
- Discussing cancer with your family is very difficult, but it helps to have it out in the open. Keeping cancer a secret can lead to more stress at a time when you need support from others.
- Your family and friends may not know what to say, or they may say something thoughtless or unkind without thinking. Try to give them time to get past their first reactions before judging them.
- Be direct, and express your needs and feelings openly.
- Plan for the best time and place to bring it up.