

From Barriers to Bridges: Improving Oncology Outcomes Through Cultural Awareness

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Background

Significant racial and ethnic disparities persist in oncology outcomes across the United States, particularly among Hispanic/Latinx populations and other historically marginalized groups (Bencomo-Alvarez et al., n.d.; Blue et al., 2023; Yanez et al., 2022).

Patients with hematologic malignancies face compounded challenges related to structural inequities, access to care, cultural mistrust, language barriers, and underrepresentation in clinical trials (Bencomo-Alvarez et al., n.d.; Yanez et al., 2022).

Cultural awareness and culturally responsive care have emerged as critical components in improving engagement, treatment adherence, survivorship outcomes, and patient-provider relationships within oncology settings (Blue et al., 2023).

Reducing Disparities

The University of Miami uses the following approaches to reduce disparities:

- Ambulatory Referral to Social Work
- Distress Screening Process
- EPIC Secure Chat's
- Self-Referral

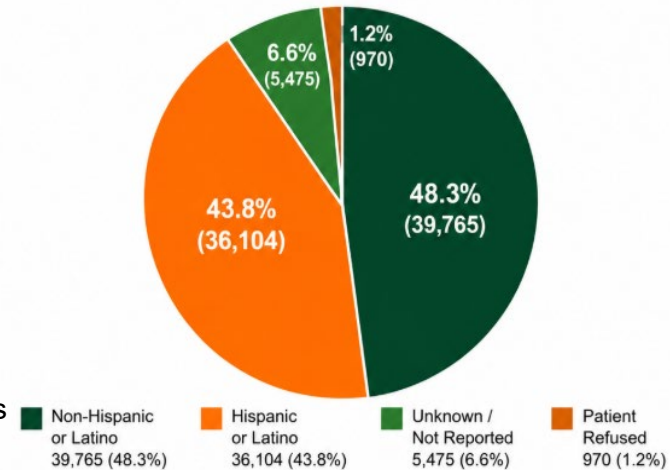
Oncology social workers conduct comprehensive psychosocial assessments and identify social determinants of health impacting treatment adherence and outcomes. Assessments evaluate barriers including transportation, financial toxicity, insurance concerns, emotional distress, housing instability, caregiver support, health literacy, and access to community resources.

Interventions may include resource navigation, transportation and lodging assistance, financial assistance referrals, emotional support, coordination of care, interpreter utilization, and linkage to community-based services to improve access and continuity of oncology treatment.

Population Served

At the University of Miami, oncology social workers serve a diverse patient population, with a near-even distribution of Hispanic (43.8%) and non-Hispanic (48.3%) patients. This highlights the need for culturally responsive care and systematic SDOH assessment, as data from January to May 2026 underscore the importance of tailored interventions to support equitable access to care.

Patient Encounters by Ethnicity



Key Findings

Findings demonstrate that oncology social work plays a critical role in identifying and addressing psychosocial, financial, and access-to-care barriers among a diverse patient population, with Hispanic or Latino patients representing 43.8% of encounters. These results underscore the importance of culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate interventions to support equitable access to cancer care and improve treatment adherence (American Cancer Society, 2024; Yanez et al., 2022; Blue et al., 2023; CancerCare, 2022).

Conclusion

Culturally responsive, system-level approaches are essential to improving oncology outcomes. Integrating social work interventions into cancer care delivery can reduce disparities and enhance outcomes for Hispanic/Latinx patients (Bencomo-Alvarez et al., 2023; Yanez et al., 2022).

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