

# Sharing Colorectal Cancer Follow-Up Using an E-Care Plan Between Cancer Services and Primary Health Care

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**Abstract.** High quality, long term follow-up care for cancer patients needs to be coordinated, comprehensive and tailored to the diverse needs of patients. This study implemented shared follow-up care using an interactive e-care plan that provided a collaborative space to schedule and share goals, tasks and information and support the monitoring of care. Qualitative results identified good relational coordination. Increasing communication from the cancer service is important.

**Keywords.** E-health, care plan, cancer survivorship, integrated care

## 1. Introduction

High-quality, long-term follow-up care for cancer patients needs to be coordinated, comprehensive and tailored to the diverse needs of patients [1]. Successful collaboration and coordination of care needs shared goals, knowledge and mutual respect, reinforced with communication and structural interventions that support health services and primary health care. These include, for example, cross-structural information systems and teamwork [2]. Sharing care using interactive, electronic care plans can provide a collaborative space to support the scheduling, monitoring, and sharing of information between cancer services, primary health care and patients. The aim of this study is to evaluate an interactive e-care plan shared between cancer services and primary health care to improve communication and collaboration in colorectal cancer follow-up care [4].

## 2. Methods

This was a feasibility study at two cancer services in Southeastern Sydney, Australia. Cancer specialists, cancer care coordinators, general practitioners and colorectal cancer patients were enrolled in shared follow-up care that used an e-care plan. Qualitative interviews were conducted at baseline, 6 and 12 months. Relational Coordination Theory [2] informed the coding and analysis.

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### 3. Results

Three specialists and three care coordinators, nine patients and their GPs (7) were interviewed two to three times over the course of the study.

Patients trusted and liked having their GP involved in their care. Most had long term relationships with their GP. Patients who spoke a language other than English found it easier to communicate with their GP who spoke their language. Some patients wanted to see more communication through the e-care plan, particularly from specialists. In some cases no communication was evident. Patients could see that pathology results were being shared. Some patients shared information through the care plan.

GPs found the e-care plan a useful tool for sharing information, although communication from the specialist varied. The e-care plan assisted some patients to be more involved and it gave the GPs more confidence in providing care. They particularly liked having the specialist involved and providing guidance. Some GPs felt they were part of a team. The e-care plan had some effect on decision making with the scheduling of tasks and timeframes.

Specialists liked that the e-care plan provided a common goal and structure to shared care. Specialist communication through the e-care plan varied. It was a barrier that the e-care plan was not integrated with cancer service clinical information systems. Care coordinators thought the e-care plan was a good idea but they were concerned about its impact on their workload. Both care coordinators and specialists found it difficult to transition to a new routine, particularly for a small number of patients.

### 4. Conclusions

Higher levels of relational coordination are associated with quality outcomes including patient reported quality of care, patient trust and confidence and shared decision making between patients and care providers [4]. The shared e-care plan is an innovation that supports relational coordination. Further work to scale shared e-care planning will require strategies that support transitioning to new routines, particularly at the cancer service. Integrating the e-care plan with cancer service clinical information systems may assist with improving communication.

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