

THE Importance of Caring

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my journey into health care



Shelby Czarnick, LICSW

CANCER SUPPORT SERVICE SPECIALIST

Shelby Czarnick, LICSW, has a background in mental health therapy and program development – both of which have been useful to her in her role as cancer support service specialist at Columbus Community Hospital (CCH).

Czarnick started in this position in September 2018, just as CCH was creating its new patient navigation program for area residents who had been diagnosed with cancer. The program created Czarnick's position, as well as an oncology nurse navigator position that would better educate and prepare patients for cancer treatment.

Czarnick and Adrian Tasa, RN, BSN, OCN, CCH's first oncology nurse navigator, connect with patients soon after their cancer diagnosis and guide them through the entire process of their cancer treatment.

Patient navigation programs and positions like these have been shown to improve patient's timely access to medical treatment, as well as patients' comfort level with, and understanding, of the health care system.

Czarnick is a licensed mental health provider who also has a background in medical social work. She got her bachelor's degree in psychology from Northwest Missouri State University, where she focused on research. She then went on to do coursework at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) in their community counseling program where she learned a lot about substance abuse. From there, she transferred to, and completed, a Master of Social Work program at UNO, and became licensed to do therapy.

Before moving into her position as cancer support service specialist, Czarnick assisted with medical social work at CCH for about five years and served as a licensed mental health therapist at Good Neighbor Community Health Center in Columbus. In her role at Good Neighbor Community Health Center, Czarnick also got to work on program development.

Each of these experiences have helped Czarnick with the development of the CCH's patient navigation program and her role as cancer support service specialist. In this position, Czarnick assists patients with all of their nonmedical needs by connecting patients to resources for financial or legal matters, and providing counseling or referrals for additional mental health treatment.

"I range from helping with referrals for financing or assistance at home to transportation to doing counseling and therapy with patients if they find that adjusting to cancer has been difficult," she said.

Czarnick works with patients being treated through the Hematology & Oncology Consultants, PC, office in CCH's Visiting Physicians Clinic, as well as patients who are receiving care through Columbus Cancer Care, which provides radiation oncology. She also visits patients who are receiving chemotherapy or fluids through CCH's Infusion Services.

"I try to get to know patients one-on-one and talk to them about the program and/or provide some referrals and assessments," Czarnick said.

In general, Czarnick tries to be there for patients throughout the duration of their cancer treatment and she also acts as resources for patients after their treatment is complete.

For example, Czarnick helps facilitate the survivorship program, *A Time to Heal*, a 12-topic holistic program designed to assist patients as they move forward following cancer treatment. Czarnick also assists with the Columbus Cancer Care Support Group.

Moving forward, Czarnick said the patient navigation program is looking into adding more of these types of programs in the community, such as peer-to-peer support groups or caregiver support groups.

"Working with this program, one of the things I've learned is how much cancer affects your relationships, because everyone reacts differently once they're diagnosed or someone they know is diagnosed," she said.

With that in mind, Czarnick has also met with family members of cancer patients to help them adjust to the process of cancer diagnosis and treatment. Czarnick said working with patients and their family members in this way, and working in health care in general, is very rewarding.

"It can be very fulfilling, because it gives you the opportunity to give back and help people and patients in the community," she said.

For more information on Czarnick and CCH's comprehensive cancer care services, visit www.columbushosp.org.