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## Survivorship care for older adults with cancer: U13 conference report



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### ABSTRACT

Older adult cancer survivors currently account for almost 60% of all cancer survivors. The number of older cancer survivors will continue to increase as the population ages and as patients' live longer after a cancer diagnosis. As part of cancer center accreditation, the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer® (CoC) has placed great importance on survivorship care planning. While the CoC has set standards for general survivorship care, there is sparse evidence on how to best care for older adult cancer survivors. Concern exists among the medical community that survivorship care plans could increase paperwork without improving outcomes. Given the diverse and unique needs of older adult cancer survivors, the inter-professional team provides a structure and process for survivorship care built around the particular needs of older adults. The Cancer and Aging Research Group (CARG), in partnership with the NIA/NCI, held a U13 conference in May 2015 in part to discuss survivorship care for older adults with cancer. This report discusses four themes that emerged from one section of the conference: (1) survivorship care is a process that continually evolves to meet the needs of older adults; (2) older adult cancer survivors have unique needs and care plans should be tailored to meet these needs; (3) the inter-professional team is ideally suited to structure survivorship care of older adults; (4) patient advocacy must be encouraged throughout the cancer care continuum. As evidence based survivorship practices develop, the unique needs of older adults need to be given substantial attention.

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## Contents

1. Introduction . . . . .	306
2. Survivorship care for older adults . . . . .	307
3. Survivorship care: Unique considerations . . . . .	307
4. Inter-professional survivorship care team . . . . .	308
5. Patient advocacy . . . . .	310
6. Conclusions . . . . .	311
Disclosures and Conflict of Interest Statements . . . . .	311
Author Contributions . . . . .	311
Acknowledgments . . . . .	311
References . . . . .	311

## 1. Introduction

The National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship® (NCCS) defines a cancer survivor as any person diagnosed with cancer, from the time of initial diagnosis until the end of life.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, there were nearly 14 million cancer survivors in the United States<sup>2</sup> with an estimated 60% of these survivors over 65 years old.<sup>3</sup> By 2020, the number of older adult cancer survivors is expected to increase to 11 million, accounting for about two-thirds of all cancer survivors.<sup>3</sup> The reason for the increase in the number of older adult cancer survivors is two-fold: (1) the population is aging and the older adult population is expected to increase from 40.3 million in 2010 to 74 million by 2030<sup>4</sup> and (2) older adults are surviving longer after a cancer diagnosis.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, the NCCS has expanded its definition of a cancer survivor to include family, caregivers, and friends affected by a patient with cancer.<sup>7</sup> If this broader definition is used, the raw number of cancer survivors is likely exponentially larger. This expanded definition has important implications for survivorship care for older adults with cancer, as many rely on caregivers, family, and friends throughout the cancer care continuum.

Given these trends, the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer® (CoC) includes survivorship care planning as a requirement for accreditation since treatment for cancer often leaves behind residual short- and long-term physical, functional, and psychosocial consequences. While it is important to understand and manage treatment-related effects at any point across the cancer care continuum, these lingering issues are even more complex in older adults. Aging itself can present a set of challenges, such as increases in blood pressure, compromised immune function, decrease in reserve capacity, and other physiologic decrements.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the experience of cancer in older adults often is superimposed on existing health conditions, including heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, and geriatric syndromes.<sup>7,8</sup> The extent to which these normative age-related changes and coexisting comorbid conditions affect treatment and survivorship issues in older adults is relatively unknown.

Several national organizations, as well as the cancer advocacy community, have recognized the unique needs that adult cancer survivors may face following treatment.<sup>9</sup> As a result, for hospitals and cancer centers wishing to maintain CoC

accreditation, beginning January of 2015, the CoC mandated delivery of treatment summaries and survivorship care plans for patients completing treatment. These are documents that detail a patient's cancer and treatment history as well as a follow-up care plan, which is given to the patient and to other healthcare providers.<sup>10</sup> The CoC cites the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report from 2006, "From Cancer Patient to Cancer Survivor: Lost in Transition", as the basis for this new requirement.<sup>11</sup> The CoC requires that the survivorship care plans be prepared by the patient's primary oncologist and be given to the patient on completion of cancer-directed therapy. While this is a welcomed step in the right direction, research on the efficacy of treatment summaries and care plans in relation to improved health outcomes and quality of care is only beginning to emerge. This new CoC requirement has raised questions within the oncology community about how to implement these care plans in the most effective and efficient way to improve patient care. Many healthcare providers fear that survivorship care plans could increase paperwork without improving patient outcomes.<sup>12</sup> Because 60% of cancer survivors are over the age of 65,<sup>3</sup> as the body of evidence for best practices develops, the unique needs and issues of older adults should be given significant consideration.

The objectives of this article are to present findings from the U13 conference entitled "Design and Implementation of Interventional Studies to Improve or Maintain Quality of Survivorship in Older and/or Frail Adults with Cancer". The U13 conference was a grant-funded cooperative conference held in Chicago in May of 2015 to advance geriatric oncology research. Given the growing number of older adult cancer survivors coupled with new requirements for survivorship care, one section of the U13 conference was dedicated to discussing survivorship care for older adults with cancer. This report addresses four themes that emerged from the conference:

1. Survivorship care is a process that continually evolves to meet the needs of older adults.
2. Older adult cancer survivors have unique needs during survivorship and care plans should be tailored to meet these needs.
3. The inter-professional team is ideally suited to structure survivorship care for older adults

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