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Merck grants $1.99 Mn to ACS to improve cancer care

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$1.99 Million Grant Supports Patient Navigation Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa



The Merck Foundation (the Foundation) and the American Cancer Society (ACS) announced that the Foundation awarded a $1.99 million, five-year grant to ACS to improve support and access to care for people living with cancer in low-and-middle-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. This funding will help ACS further develop its capacity development approach to expanding patient navigation to countries with a growing burden of cancer.

More than 70% of the 9 million cancer-related deaths worldwide are in resource-limited settings, where patients face many barriers in seeking a timely diagnosis and receiving high-quality cancer care. Patient navigators—whether nurses providing cancer education or lay health workers linking patients to transportation services in the community—play a vital role in supporting patients from the point of diagnosis at a health facility through their treatment journey.

With support from the Foundation, ACS will fortify its patient navigation program in Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), a national referral hospital in Kenya, and adapt it for a high need facility in Uganda – The Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI), which serves about 200 patients daily.

This grant is a first step toward broad expansion of patient navigation programs to help more patients in resource-limited settings receive timely, high-quality cancer care. As part of this effort, ACS will develop a comprehensive guide and toolkit to develop and implement patient navigation programs, designed specifically for health facilities in low- and middle-income countries. Lessons learned from collaborating with hospitals in Kenya and Uganda will be incorporated into this guide, which ACS will pilot in health institutions in Asia and Latin America.

ACS hopes to demonstrate that resource-limited health care institutions can use patient navigation as an effective tool to improve cancer care. Looking ahead, ACS will help KNH and UCI integrate patient navigation services into the way they deliver cancer care, with the goal of transforming the patient experience so patients continue to receive the timely, high-quality cancer care they need.

“Uganda has a population of 43 million, but there are only 20 oncologists in the entire country. That’s one of the reasons why patient navigators are so important in helping patients manage the day-to-day challenges that prevent them from receiving care and empowering them to seek treatment and stay in care,” says Dr. Jackson Orem, Executive Director of the Uganda Cancer Institute.

ACS will work with the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University in Atlanta to evaluate the implementation of the patient navigation programs in Kenya and Uganda as well as the pilot of the program design guide and implementation toolkit. The evaluation team will disseminate its findings to the global cancer community and other interested stakeholders to advance the field’s knowledge of how to effectively support cancer patients in resource-limited settings.