New Patient Guide from NCCN Jumpstarts Important Conversations About Anal Cancer

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network publishes a new guide that includes updated patient guidelines for colon and rectal cancers.

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The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN®) today announced the publication of new NCCN Guidelines for Patients® Anal Cancer, in addition to recently updated patient guidelines for colon and rectal cancers. These new and updated resources are made possible through the NCCN Foundation®. The books provide unbiased guidance from leading experts that provide people with cancer and their caregivers with a baseline understanding of management options and empower them to ask questions of their health care providers—particularly regarding complicated, stressful, or stigmatized topics.

“Facing an anal cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming and filled with uncertainty. That’s why ACF partnered with NCCN to translate its evidence-based, expert-consensus clinical guidelines from the leading cancer hospitals in the country into a patient-friendly format,” said Justine Almada, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Anal Cancer Foundation, which sponsored publication of the new NCCN Guidelines for Patients: Anal Cancer. “This comprehensive guide empowers patients and their caregivers by providing them access to the same information as their doctors. The more individuals and families understand about anal cancer, its treatment, and side-effects, the better prepared they are to actively participate in their care and have meaningful conversations with their medical team about treatment and recovery.”

“Patients with cancer in general need access to the most reliable, up-to-date information possible,” explained Al B. Benson III, MD, FACP, FASCO, Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University, Chair of the NCCN Guidelines Panel for Colon/Rectal/Anal Cancers. “The NCCN Guidelines for Patients provide a framework for discussion and help people to formulate questions, while not replacing the personal interactions between a patient and their medical team.”

“Clinical trials are helping us to understand the growing role for immunotherapy in treating anal cancer,” added panel Vice-Chair Alan Venook, MD, UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center. “We’re trying to get away from more toxic forms of chemotherapy that had been

standard of care for this disease type for more than 50 years. Patients are also often surprised to learn that we most often avoid surgery when treating anal cancer, unlike in colon and rectal cancers."

According to the NCCN Guidelines for Patients: Anal Cancer:

- Anal cancer incidence is on the rise in the United States and is strongly linked to the human papillomavirus (HPV).
- Chemoradiation is the recommended primary treatment for most patients with non-metastatic anal cancer.
- Immune checkpoint inhibitors are an option for second-line therapy with metastatic disease.

"No one should ignore symptoms or family history, because unfortunately we're seeing many of these young patients diagnosed at later stages," said Dr. Benson. He and Dr. Venook cautioned that no one should be considered "too young" to be tested for colon, rectal, or anal cancers if they experience bleeding, significant weight loss/changes in bowel habits, or have an immediate family member diagnosed with one of these cancers.

Drs. Benson and Venook both stressed the importance of young people getting vaccinated against HPV in order to reduce their chances of developing anal cancer, along with cervical, oropharyngeal, and other cancer types.

The NCCN Guidelines for Patients are based on the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®) which are created by multidisciplinary teams of experts from across NCCN Member Institutions. NCCN Guidelines® are the recognized standard for clinical direction and policy in cancer care and the most thorough and frequently updated clinical practice guidelines available in any area of medicine. The patient versions are presented in easy-to-read language and format—with charts, images, and a glossary of medical terms—and were found to be among the most trustworthy options for cancer patients seeking information online according to a recent independent study.

There are now more than 50 different books for patients and caregivers from NCCN covering every major type of cancer, along with topics like managing cancer-related distress, nausea and vomiting, and survivorship (both healthy living & cancer-related late and long-term effects), plus special considerations for adolescents and young adults across all cancer types. Printed versions are available for a nominal fee at Amazon.com in addition to the free digital versions at NCCN.org/patients.

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