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## Family Reach hosts virtual Imagine Session on Cancer Equity: Understanding Health Disparities to Improve Patient Care and Support Programs

*The session was moderated by Dr. Yousuf Zafar and covered a wide range of topics from describing how social determinants of health affects cancer patients to hinting to potential steps forward to make systemic change.*

Boston, MA [October 20th, 2020] — Family Reach, a national organization focused on providing financial wrap around services to families facing cancer, held its first of three Imagine sessions. The next session is scheduled for Dec. 15.

Dr. Yousuf Zafar moderated the panel, which included former President of the Lash Group and current President of the Family Reach Board of Directors Tracy Ott Foster; Dr. Lorraine Dean from Johns Hopkins; and Dr. Oluwadamilola Motunrayo Fayanju from Duke Cancer Institute.

Family Reach CEO Carla Tardif introduced and wrapped the session, which was described as a quick and informative hour.

To set the stage, Claudia Begino, MSW, LCSW, opened the session talking about what she sees as a social worker and centered on one story in particular.

The patient was a Latina in her 40s, single mother of three children, one of which was a patient diagnosed with ALL. After getting the necessary treatment, her son was in maintenance. The mother brought him in for a lab appointment, and she forgot to make her next appointment.

Her care team thought she could possibly be neglectful in her care. They reached out to her social worker, and considered more severe measures. A community liaison was sent out to do a home visit.

"It turned out the only thing standing between her son and this appointment was her cell phone bill," Begino explained. "She didn't have enough money to pay her bill and that's why the medical team couldn't reach her."

Begino's story was mentioned throughout the panel and served as an anchor for the panelists, as did Dr. Lorraine Dean's analogy of a backpack and how it relates to social determinants of health.

"I also would like to think about how you start with this backpack," Dean said. "These social factors, everyone has a different number of them, the heaviness of that backpack is different, and in one hand you have a cancer diagnosis, and in the other, you're juggling something like COVID. If you think about this visual of trying to navigate care while you have this baggage of social determinants, these are the things affecting how you get connected to care and stay connected to care."

Dr. Fayanju spoke to the mistrust that often happens between individuals and institutions.

"She's (Dr. Dean) speaking to the holistic way we need to deal with fostering trust between individuals and institutions," Dr. Fayanju said. "In particular, I agree with her, the idea of foisting mistrust as the fault of the victim is classic victim blaming and shaming. Why are we speaking about nonadherence of a community that has been wronged, and therefore is completely within their rights to mistrust an institution and a community? And so, it's the idea of shaping a narrative around how the institution can earn trustworthiness, rather than us trying to cultivate a falsely earned trust."

Family Reach's Vice President of Strategy and Alliances, Rosie Cunningham, applauded the virtual event.

"*Imagine* has been a catalyst for new programs and collaboration to address the financial burden of cancer for five years," Cunningham said. "In the wake of COVID-19, we knew our community would be eager to reflect on our role in cancer equity and improve how we reach the most vulnerable cancer patients and their families. *Imagine Cancer Equity* is a platform for thought leaders and innovators to unite with the shared belief that we can and must do better. We started with critical education in our first session and are eager to dig into solutions as we look forward."

The sponsors for the event were Foundation Medicine, The National Credit Union Foundation, Parexel, Protean, Guidehouse, and AmerisourceBergen.

The goal was to educate and begin the conversation that will continue over two subsequent sessions regarding cancer equity and social determinants of health. The next *Imagine* session is scheduled for Dec. 15 at 11:30 a.m. EST.

For more information and to register for the next event, [click here](#)  
To read Family Reach's blog post on this Imagine session, [click here](#).

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### About Family Reach

Family Reach is a national organization dedicated to eradicating the financial barriers that accompany a cancer diagnosis, a widespread issue. We work with patients and healthcare professionals at more than 400 top-tier hospitals and cancer centers. Family Reach developed the solutions-oriented Financial Treatment program to reach patients with support before they hit critical breaking points. The program includes services like Financial Education, Resource Navigation, Financial Planning, and the Emergency Relief Fund.

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