Opportunities for Interventions to Reduce the Financial Toxicity of Treatment for Childhood Cancer

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Background
Cancer-related financial toxicity is an unaddressed side-effect of childhood cancer, with consequences for household financial health and quality of care, including increased risk for relapse, and decreased survival rates. This project identified opportunities along the cancer journey when interventions could reduce risk of cancer-related financial toxicity for families of children with cancer.

Methods
- 17 caregivers of children diagnosed with cancer attended focus groups (n = 3)
- Children were treated in Massachusetts or New York
- All families experienced severe financial distress during treatment
- We used the concept of “social navigation” to guide thematic analysis of transcripts. Social navigation is relevant to understanding the financial side of cancer because it acknowledges and examines how people act when unanticipated disruptions (e.g. health, financial) create instability in their lives.

Results

FOUR MAJOR THEMES EMERGED FROM FOCUS GROUPS

1. Disruption Experienced when a Child has Cancer
   - Emotional shock
   - Hospital stay
   - Unpredictability of treatment

2. Caregiver’s Management of Disruption
   - Time-off from work
   - Restructured routines

3. Financial Consequences from Disruption
   - Reduced income
   - Direct and indirect medical expenses
   - Accumulation of debt

4. Caregiver’s Management of Financial Consequences
   - Increased work hours
   - Navigated insurance coverage
   - Requested financial assistance
   - Used financial reserves
   - “Fight for everything”

Conclusions
- Focus groups identified opportunities for interventions to reduce cancer-related financial toxicity for families of children with cancer throughout the cancer journey.
- With collective actions from the ecosystem of for-profit, non-profit, and public sectors these opportunities can become programs that may benefit cancer patients, families, and society.

References

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