

Topic Overview

Improving the Delivery of Complex Cancer Surgeries in Canada (Hamilton Panel)

Citizen panel
20 September 2014

The McMaster Health Forum convened a citizen panel in Hamilton on the subject of improving the delivery of complex cancer surgeries. The panel was organized with the support of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. The panel brought together 14 citizens from across the region covered by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network to examine the problem, options for addressing it, and key implementation considerations. The purpose of the panel was to guide the efforts of policymakers, managers and professional leaders who make decisions about our health systems.

Discussing the problem

Panel participants discussed shortfalls in the delivery of complex cancer surgeries in Canada and the causes of these shortfalls. In particular they focused on five challenges, which gave them the opportunity to begin to articulate the values underlying their positions on this topic: 1) making decisions in the midst of a cancer diagnosis is difficult; 2) inequities exist in access to complex cancer surgeries; 3) the cancer patient journey is marked by communication breakdowns with (and between) healthcare providers; 4) current financial arrangements limit our capacity to improve delivery of complex cancer surgeries; and 5) regulations for surgeons and hospitals are lacking.



The views expressed in the panel summary are the views of panel participants and should not be taken to represent the views of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, McMaster University, or the authors of the panel summary.





Fourteen citizens from across the region covered by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network gather during a McMaster Health Forum event on 20 September 2014.

Discussing the options

Participants reflected on four options (among many) for improving the delivery of complex cancer surgeries in Canada. The first three options were originally proposed in the pre-circulated citizen brief and the fourth option emerged during the discussion: encourage the local adoption of quality-improvement initiatives to improve the delivery of complex cancer surgeries where they are now being provided (option 1); implement province-wide quality-improvement initiatives to improve the delivery of complex cancer surgeries where they are now being provided (option 2); regionalize complex cancer surgeries into designated surgical centres of excellence (option 3); and introduce flexible care pathways that combine care in a regional centre of excellence with care provided close to home whenever possible (option 4). Overall, option 3 generally resonated most strongly with participants. Eight values-related themes emerged during the discussion, which highlighted the potential benefits of option 3 as well as areas in need of particular attention: 1) the need to continuously improve both surgical and post-operative care; 2) implementing policies based on data and evidence; 3) excellent health outcomes; 4) cost-effectiveness; 5) expertise; 6) innovation; 7) collaboration; and 8) fairness towards the patients and families who must travel to obtain surgical care. Several participants suggested option 4 as a way to introduce more flexible care pathways.

Discussing the implementation considerations

When turning to potential barriers and facilitators to moving forward, participants mostly emphasized the challenges associated with the lack of human and financial resources, and with developing commonly agreed provincial standards and regional infrastructures. However, participants acknowledged current efforts in the province to regionalize certain complex cancer surgeries and to establish province-wide standards.

Panel deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the [citizen brief](#) that was presented to participants before the panel and the [summary](#) of the panel. For an electronic copy of the citizen brief or panel summary, visit our website www.mcmasterhealthforum.com and click on 'Products' along the sidebar.



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