The Path to Reporting Excellence:

Cancer Care Ontario’s Transformative Pathology Reporting Project

CASE STUDY | MAY 31, 2014
The Challenge

Cancer pathologists used to summarize their findings by dictating results into a recorder which were then transcribed into long, narrative reports. These reports were not standardized and lacked consistency.

For cancer surgeons and oncologists, lack of consistency in pathology reports was significant, as it meant they may not have the quality of information needed to plan the best treatment approaches for patients. The pathology community, including Cancer Care Ontario (CCO), supported by the Ontario Association of Pathologists, recognized fundamental changes needed to be made.

As a result, CCO initiated a project to standardize the content and format of cancer pathology reports, as well as develop a system to transmit the reports in real time to the Ontario Cancer Registry, using electronic tools.
The Solution

The Pathology Reporting Project endeavoured to create a new, pioneering process and system that standardized cancer pathology reports. Hundreds of pathologists and hospital staff were engaged in this province-wide initiative. Many partners also collaborated including the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, Canada Health Infoway, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Canadian Association of Pathologists and the Ontario Association of Pathologists. An expert panel of pathologists determined that the best standard to adopt was the College of American Pathologists cancer checklists, which is considered the international gold standard.

With the new reports, rather than using dictation and transcription, pathologists now use an electronic pathology report. This report has disease site specific information which the pathologist enters in a standardized manner using multiple choice drop-down menus and check boxes to record his/her findings. The result is a complete and standardized report automatically generated for surgeons and oncologists.

As the report is finalized and delivered to the surgeon, it is simultaneously sent via electronic information systems from the hospital’s lab and transmitted in real time, by an electronic pathway network (ePath), to CCO’s Ontario Cancer Registry.

The Benefits

- Used by approximately 400 tissue pathologists in 115 hospitals in Ontario. Annually, there are approximately 60,000 new cancer cases in the province with over 90% of the cancer pathology reports received in standardized synoptic format
- Data can be analyzed individually for quality metrics, including analysis at the regional and clinician level
- Allows CCO to create and report key surgical quality indicators to hospitals, surgeons and pathologists, helping to drive quality improvements in cancer surgery
- Has provided major advancements in the quality, timeliness and completeness of cancer pathology reports and increased accessibility of information

60,000+ NUMBER OF REPORTS GENERATED ANNUALLY

- No matter which hospital a patient is treated at in Ontario, the surgeon and oncologist now have the same information available to make treatment decisions
- CCO uses the collected data from the reports to count the number of new cancers in order to monitor cancer incidence, survival patterns and other cancer trends – all factors to continually improve cancer care in the province
The Pathology Reporting Project is the world’s first and largest standardized electronic cancer pathology reporting initiative. As a result, Cancer Care Ontario has been invited to present the reports in the United Kingdom, Australia, Norway, New Zealand, Brazil and Ireland.

Leadership

- This is the world’s first and largest standardized electronic cancer pathology reporting initiative

- Checklists are now endorsed as a pan-Canadian standard and a new national initiative is under way, spearheaded by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, to support other provinces to implement the standard through electronic tools

- CCO has been invited to present the reports in the United Kingdom, Australia, Norway, New Zealand, Brazil and Ireland. Achievements of the project have also been published in peer reviewed journals

- This demonstrates CCO is a world leader in information management technologies and tools for assessing the quality of cancer diagnosis

- The project has spurred additional pursuits in standardized reporting, such as a new initiative to standardize radiology reports

- New checklists for biomarkers and genetic markers have been developed by the College of American Pathologists, with CCO input, which could potentially improve current reporting and include even more types of cancer
WHAT CLINICIANS ARE SAYING:

“The new pathology reports remove doubt about report findings. There is clarity of information which is presented in a crisp, consistent format. It gives confidence to healthcare providers and it’s easier and quicker for physicians to see the data needed for treatment discussions and decisions.”

Dr. Demo Divaris, Chief of Pathology, Grand River Hospital and Clinical Advisor at CCO

“The most gratifying aspect of the pathology checklist project was engaging more than 400 pathologists practicing in over 100 hospitals using multiple laboratory information systems. In the end, we had a pathology reporting system that was better for our clinical colleagues and certainly better for secondary users including the Ontario Cancer Registry.”

Dr. John Srigley, Clinical Lead, Pathology Checklist Project (2004-12)

“My surgeon provided me with a copy of my pathology report. Because of its clarity and completeness, I was then able to research the facts of that report and validate my oncologist’s proposed treatment plans. Knowing that my treatment plan was in line with recommended practice gave me a greater sense of confidence in my healthcare providers and hope for a positive outcome.”

Marianne Luettschwager, patient and cancer survivor

“Synoptic reporting simplifies making a diagnosis of cancer by providing all relevant medication information in a standardized format. This makes clinical treatment decisions available, ensuring that patients receive the ideal treatment, for the exact type of cancer and the exact stage of tumour.”

Dr. Tarek Rahmeh, Pathologist, Saint John Regional Hospital, New Brunswick

Pathologists are...

Cancer pathologists are physicians who examine tissue and cells that are removed during surgery in order to confirm or rule out cancer. In essence, they are diagnostic oncologists. They provide critical information to surgeons and oncologists about the type of cancer diagnosed and key tumour characteristics, which guides treatment decisions and outcomes. In some cases, pathologists offer key insight on how a cancer may respond to new targeted therapies.

RELATED SOURCES

Journal of Oncology Practice, Closing the Quality Loop: Facilitating Improvement in Oncology Practice Through Timely Access to Clinical Performance Indicators

Archives of Pathology, Standardized Synoptic Cancer Pathology Reports—So What and Who Cares?