Cancer Organisation Websites: Dietary & Nutritional Advice for Symptom Management

M.Barrett¹ P.Uí Dhuibhir¹,² C.Njoroge³ D.Walsh¹,⁴

¹ Academic Dept. of Palliative Medicine, Our Lady's Hospice & Care Services, Dublin
² School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Science, University College Dublin
³ School of Nursing & Human Sciences, Dublin City University
⁴ Levine Cancer Institute, North Carolina

Background
• Symptoms affecting nutrition common in cancer
• Cancer patients not routinely referred to dietitian
• May seek nutritional advice from alternative sources
• National Cancer Organisations (NCO) offer dietary & nutritional advice for common cancer symptoms

Aims
• Examine accessibility and relevance of advice for symptom control management on NCO websites

Methods
• English language NCO websites were identified through web search
• Dietary & nutritional advice for 8 common nutrition-impact symptoms extracted (Fig. 1)
• Ease of access and relevance of advice evaluated

Results
• 9 NCO websites searched (Fig. 2)
• All offered:
  (i) general healthy eating guidelines
  (ii) recommended healthcare professional input
• Common dietary advice given for:
  - anorexia (small frequent meals)
  - constipation (increase fluids & fibre)
  - dysphagia (soft foods)
  - nausea & vomiting (small frequent meals)
• ↑ Calorie and ↑ Protein intake recommended for anorexia, dysphagia and sore mouth. Examples of food and recipes included but no website defined the diets (i.e. grams/day per macronutrient)
• No micronutrient advice except ↑ Na & K for diarrhoea
• Little/no advice for early satiety and smell disturbances
• Website navigation varied; difficult to extract information

Conclusions
1. Referral to dietitian or healthcare professional for guidance recommended by all NCOs
2. Practical dietary advice for common symptoms. Other symptoms not addressed
3. High-calorie, high-protein diets recommended for some symptoms but advice non-specific
4. Website navigation challenging and negatively impacted information access