

Eric Chmielewski Senate Testimony 09/09/2025 – Prostate Cancer Subcommittee

- From a medication perspective, treatment of a patient with prostate cancer may include oral medications taken in the home setting, infusion or injection chemotherapy medications that are administered by a health care professional in an infusion center or other care setting, or radiopharmaceutical treatments administered in a radiation oncology office setting.
- Treatment regimens can include a combination of these therapies and change throughout the progression of a patient's disease. This is important because it highlights the complexity and the logistical considerations for patients as they receive treatment throughout the course of their disease.
- Rural patients in South Carolina can be disproportionately affected by factors including access and geographical distance to care locations that can provide these specialized treatments. They may also have lower socioeconomic status that can impact their ability to afford these often high-cost therapies.
- Health system pharmacy programs like we offer at McLeod Health can help address some of these barriers through comprehensive patient management programs that help patients stay adherent and continue taking their medications and also evaluate side effects and patient ability to afford their medicines that serve as barriers to a patient remaining on treatment. These programs can then work quickly and directly with our Cancer Center care team to try and address these issues, so a patient does not have gaps in their treatment due to access, side effects, or inability to afford their medications.
- One challenge that our health system faces is pharmacy insurance providers or PBMs that restrict patients from being able to use our pharmacy to fill their prescriptions and therefore restrict their access to these beneficial programs. Instead, they require that patients use that PBM's internal specialty pharmacy to fill their medication, and their pharmacies either do not offer these patient management programs or offer services that are significantly lower quality. This is unfortunate because our health system is going to be the most invested in ensuring that patients in our community receive high-quality and prompt care. Whereas we can get a patient established on treatment in a few business days, when a patient is required to use one of these external pharmacies, they will often have to wait two to three weeks or more to begin treatment and then frequently suffer gaps in their care when changes are made.
- The other important consideration is that prostate cancer is typically diagnosed in men when they are at or past the age of retirement, meaning that these patients will typically be established on Medicare and a Medicare Part D plan for their medical and prescription coverage.
- This also means that many of these patients will be on a fixed income with limited ability to absorb sudden high-cost medical and prescription bills to afford their treatments, leaving many patients in a situation where they need to choose between affording their treatments or affording food and housing and taking care of their families.
- Some of the primary medications that are used to treat prostate cancer have a list price that can be as high as between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per month of treatment. Even with the new \$2,000 out of pocket maximum for Medicare Part D, patients will often have an upfront copay of \$1,000-\$2,000 with their first prescription, which many patients have difficulty affording.
- It is also a challenge to find mechanisms to help the Medicare population afford their medications because they are not eligible for drug manufacturer copay assistance programs due to specific regulations.

- This is an area that illustrates the importance of the 340B program to health systems as it makes it possible for them to fund grants to help patients afford their medications. The 340B program also allows McLeod Health to offer a unique Free Cancer Clinic program in the state that covers some or all the cost of a patient's treatment when they are unable to afford their care.
- In summary, prostate cancer patient treatment can be complex and include several different treatment modalities, patients can benefit from comprehensive management programs through collaboration between health system pharmacy departments and cancer center care teams, and the high costs of therapy is an ongoing challenge for patients being able to afford their treatments as their disease progresses.

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