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For Immediate Release

Cancer Support Community and Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation Amplify their Partnership
Increased support from Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation Elevates Essential Psychological Distress Screenings

COLUMBUS, Ohio (November 28, 2018) – Cancer Support Community Central Ohio is continuing to offer vital assistance to cancer survivors and their caregivers through its distress screening and referral program, which received major funding from the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation. The distress screening program is a core component of the overall educational and support services provided by Cancer Support Community for people at high risk of psychological distress as a result of a cancer diagnosis.

According to the Ohio Department of Health, more than 8,000 residents of central Ohio are diagnosed with cancer each year. “A cancer diagnosis has implications that extend beyond the physical impact of the disease,” said Bev Soult, President and CEO of Cancer Support Community Central Ohio. “Cancer creates social and emotional effects that resonate throughout every aspect of a person’s life, and the lives of family, co-workers and caregivers.”

Research shows that up to half of all cancer patients experience significant enough distress to impact their quality of life and their participation in treatment. If left untreated, distress can lead to clinical anxiety and depression, resulting in overall poorer health outcomes and increased health care system costs. And caregivers experience distress at a higher rate than cancer survivors.

“Addressing distress and managing concerns through counseling and support services yields cost savings to the entire health care system,” Soult offered. “This grant has allowed us to provide screenings and referrals for 182 survivors and caregivers in 2017 who are most at risk for distress and provide them with the support and education they desperately need.”

Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation has increased funding to support the program through mid-2019. This most recent grant was the third contribution from the foundation specifically for this program. A total of 582 cancer survivors and caregivers have been screened since Cancer Support Community started providing the program in 2014.

Cancer Support Community’s Clinical Program Director, Angie Santangelo, MSW, LISW-S, has continued to implement the program since it began in 2014, using the organization’s nationally recognized, validated distress screening tool, CancerSupportSource[®], which gauges where the participant rates on an emotional scale and aids in the creation of an individualized wellness plan for the participant. Screening unlocks the door to quality care.

“Based on the results from each survey, we work with the individual to develop a customized plan for coping with his or her unique situation,” said Santangelo. “The survey helps start the conversation about concerns that need to be addressed before they become a barrier to care.”

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Pete G. was diagnosed with a blood cancer shortly after he moved to Columbus. He reached out to Cancer Support Community and started participating in some of the programs, finding the support he needed. When Pete took the distress screening, he learned that he was at risk for depression.

“That was a surprise to me,” Pete offered. “The cancer diagnosis threw me off in the first place. I was acting erratically but didn’t know why. But my focus was on solving the cancer issue, not depression. I was more concentrated on treating the cancer than my mood.”

Within 30 days of the end of his cancer treatment, Pete lost his sister and a good friend to cancer. It was at this time that he realized the distress screening results needed to be investigated further. “My medical team wasn’t around any longer, I had just lost two people I loved, and the depression was just overwhelming,” said Pete.

The Individual Wellness Plan that was provided to Pete when he took the initial screening suggested that he pursue counseling, which he did, and continues to do. “The screening results helped me understand why I was feeling the way I was. If I hadn’t had the screening, I wouldn’t have known where all the depression was coming from and how to start getting help.”

“The distress screening was highly effective, and it helped me to take an active role to alleviate distress and improve my quality of life,” Pete said.

“I know first-hand the value of healthcare leaders like Anthem and I thank them from the bottom of my heart for recognizing the immense value of this program and providing funding. My distress screening helped me realize I was putting my feelings and fears on the bottom of my priority list,” Pete explained. “I started volunteering at Cancer Support Community in the office, helping in a variety of ways, including meeting with newly diagnosed individuals and family members to share my story and emphasize the importance of the distress screening program. Being able to give back in that way, as well as pursuing the counseling, have helped me move forward.”

Cancer Support Community offers more than 65 evidence-based programs each month, including stress management, exercise and healthy lifestyle programs, as well as educational workshops, to help empower participants to manage their own cancer journey. These services are in addition to individual and family counseling, and referrals to other community resources when appropriate, and are all provided at no cost.

“At Anthem, we believe that the integration of clinical care and behavioral health is essential,” said Dr. Elizabeth Bonanno, behavioral health medical director for Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Ohio. “Supporting the whole health of the individual is central to our mission of providing affordable access to high quality care. Innovative partnerships among health care organizations, like ours with the Cancer Support Community, are the key to supporting all aspects of health.”

“As more and more people are diagnosed with cancer and living longer, the need for supportive services increases,” said Soult. “Distress screening and follow-up referrals are a core component of what we do, and it provides the best opportunity to really work with the individual and help them deal with their concerns. Anthem is truly an innovative leader and we commend them for seeking affordable health benefits solutions addressing our health system’s challenges. Conversations with Anthem are ongoing, so we can continue to deliver service that result in healthier communities and lives. We thank Anthem for their investment in Cancer Support Community” Soult offered.

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About Cancer Support Community Central Ohio

The mission of Cancer Support Community Central Ohio is to ensure that all people affected by cancer are empowered by knowledge, strengthened by action, and sustained by community.

Backed by evidence that the best cancer care includes social and emotional support, Cancer Support Community offers these services *at no cost* to all people living with any type or stage of cancer, from diagnosis through survivorship. Cancer Support Community delivers a comprehensive menu of personalized and essential services including support groups, educational workshops, exercise, stress management, cooking and nutrition classes and social activities for the entire family.

Cancer Support Community is advancing the innovations that are becoming the standard in complete cancer care, so that no one faces cancer alone. For more information, please visit CancerSupportOhio.org.

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