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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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Many immigrants and other medically underserved patients lack the ability to access and afford nutritious meals as they undergo treatment for cancer. Increased spending on medical bills, time and energy-consuming appointments and treatment regimens, plus a potential loss of income and employment, make it difficult for patients to provide healthy food for themselves and their families.

As part of our Integrated Cancer Care Access Network (ICCAN) we have found that over 60% of the cancer patients we work with identify as food insecure, which means they are worried about where their next meal is coming from.

Food insecure patients often have worse treatment outcomes and a poorer quality of life, compared to patients who have enough to eat. [\(1\)](#)

The Food to Overcome Outcome Disparities (FOOD) Program is working to alleviate food insecurity within this vulnerable population and increase awareness of how food insecurity impacts a patient's ability to fight cancer.

Food Pantries for People with Cancer

Since opening our first food pantry specifically for cancer patients in 2011, the FOOD Program has distributed more than 300,000 meals to 4,000 patients and their families. We now operate 13 pantries co-located in cancer clinics serving patients in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Long Island.

Partnerships across different emergency food providers have allowed our program to continue to meet the growing demand for food resources among cancer patients. We have also been able to expand our offerings to include fresh fruits and vegetables, and healthy, low-sodium, low-sugar options to help patients manage other chronic conditions.

FOOD is currently conducting a clinical trial to study the impact of different food insecurity interventions and how increasing access to food resources can affect cancer treatment, quality of life, food security, and nutritional status for underserved patients.

Food and Nutrition Resources

In addition to distributing free food to patients across 13 treatment sites, FOOD also connects patients with a variety of other food resources. Working closely with the Food Bank for New York City, New York Common Pantry, Green Bronx Machine, and others, FOOD refers high-needs patients for additional resources. Our partner organizations connect patients with other local food pantries and soup kitchens, help eligible patients apply for Supplemental Food and Nutrition Program benefits (food stamps), and provide high-quality nutrition workshops and educational materials.

FOOD Provider Training Course

The FOOD Provider Training Course is designed to educate doctors, nurses, nutritionists, and other providers about the importance of addressing food insecurity during clinical patient encounters. This training module offers strategies and resources to help providers ensure that patients have access to healthy, culturally-appropriate foods throughout their cancer treatment. [View our training course](#) and [provide feedback](#) on the course. You can also test your knowledge from the course using our [curriculum questionnaire](#).

Contact Us

For more information about FOOD program activities, please contact Maria Cuello at cuellom@mskcc.org.

For more information about FOOD research, please contact Bharat Narang at narangb@mskcc.org.

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