

Donna Branson, Project Leader; Jeff Yancey, Ph.D., Associate Director; Liliana Mulato, Program Manager; Amelia Thelin, Patient Navigator; and Bea Lingwall, Administrative Assistant

Background

- Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) is the only NCI-designated comprehensive cancer center in the Mountain West. In 2021, HCI committed to serving UT, WY, NV, ID, and MT residents.
- The goal of this program is to provide navigation to patients and caregivers from frontier/rural areas of UT, WY, and MT.
- Frontier and rural residents face higher cancer mortality, higher frequency of late-stage cancer at diagnosis, and lower access to clinical trials.
- Average patient travels 600 miles round trip.



Frontier ≤ 6 persons per sq. mile
Rural ≤ 100 people per sq. mile

Interim Results

From January 3, 2023 to December 31, 2023, 185 frontier and rural patients received navigation services exceeding goal of 100 patients. Figure 1 shows the # of patients served in 2023. The program helps patients overcome the top three identified barriers including transportation, financial concerns, and care coordination. Gas cards are provided to help patients/caregivers reduce their travel costs. Lodging assistance is also provided as necessary. Figure 2 shows locations where patients came from during January to June 2023.

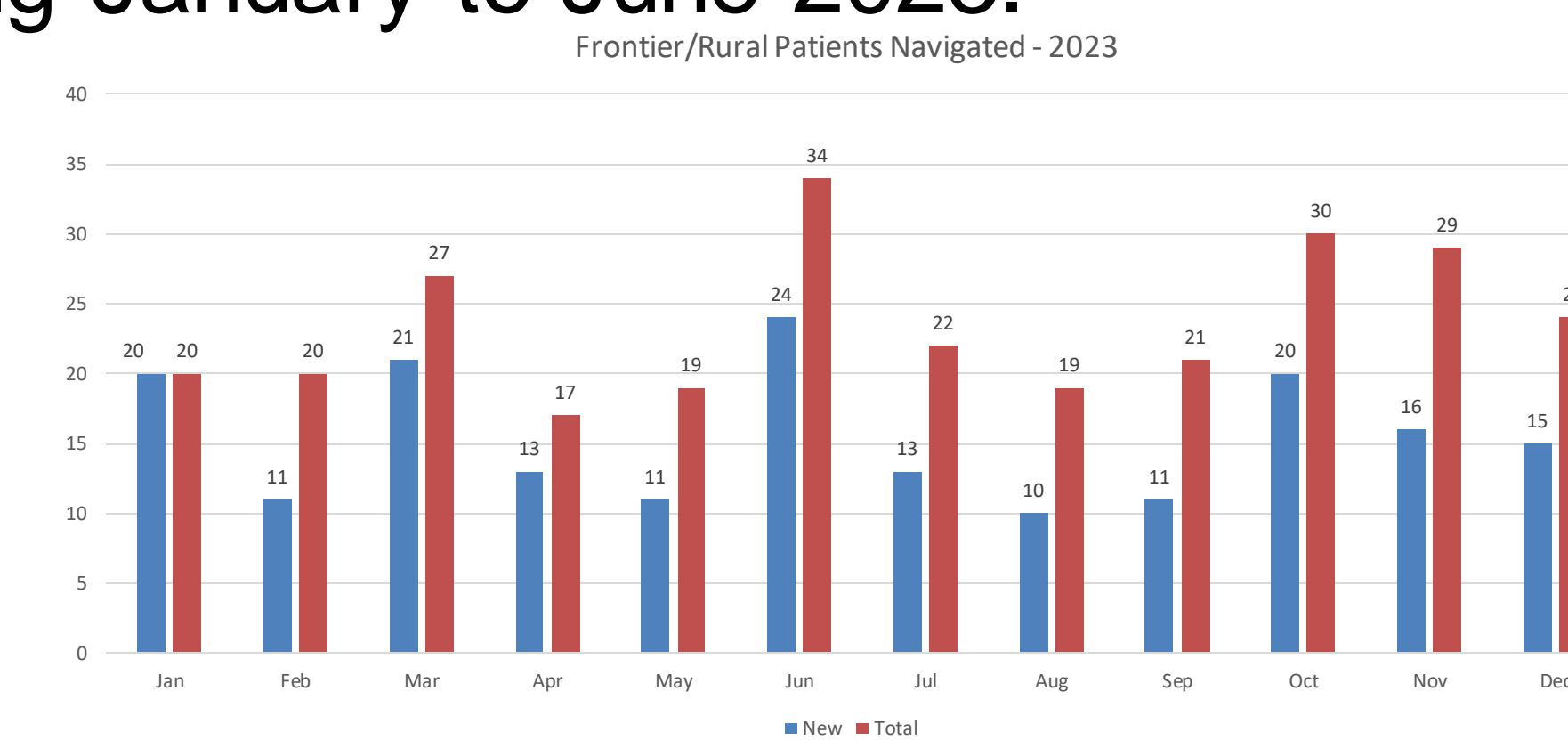


Figure 1: Patients Enrolled in Program by Month 2023

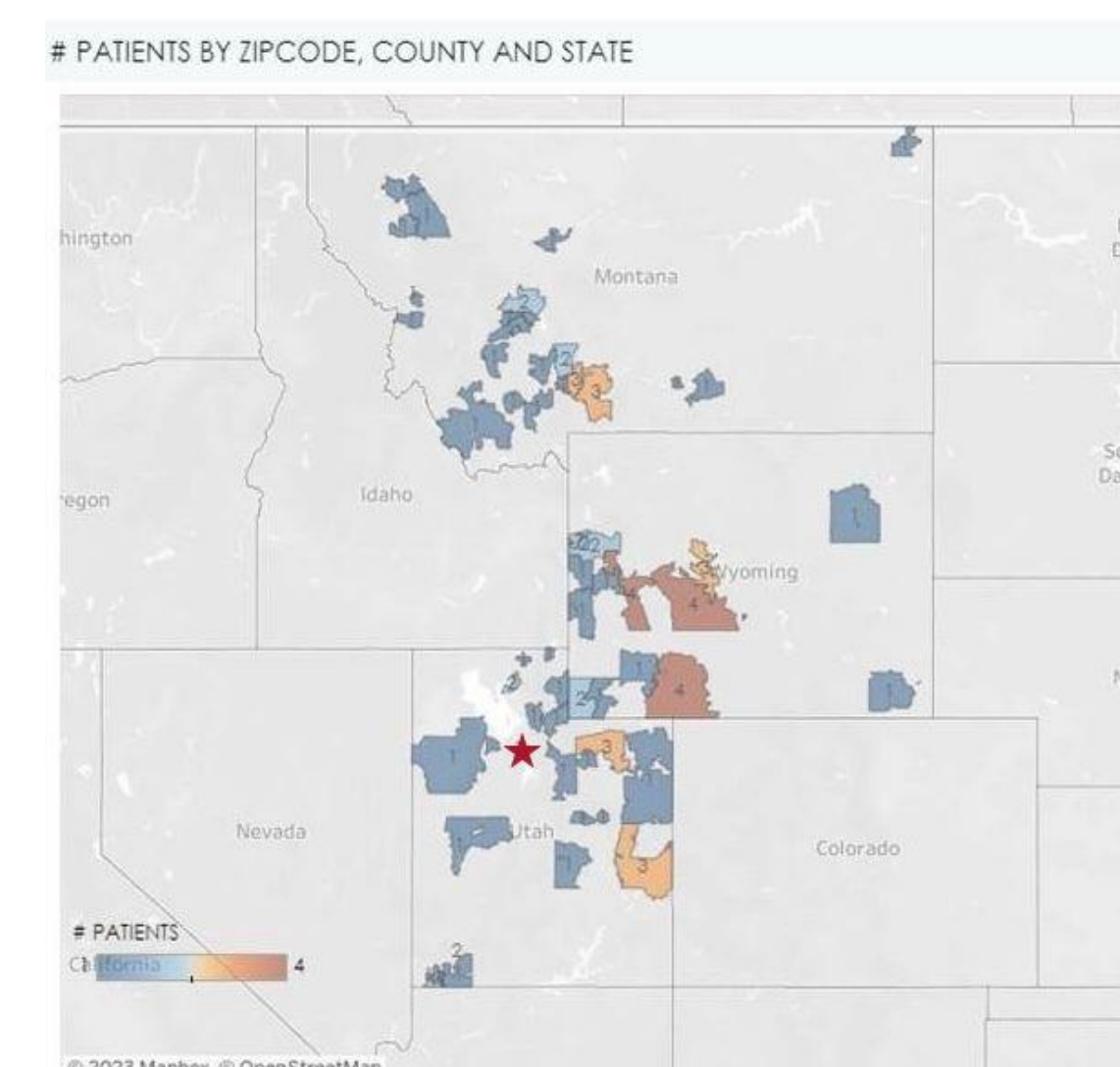


Figure 2: Distribution of Navigated Patients - Jan to June 2023

“From the very beginning, she was there to help figure out what type of travel we needed, how there are different flight opportunities and stuff. She just gave me everything that I needed or opportunities I could potentially use to travel and then allowed me to kind of figure out how it worked best for us. And she was always there, oh my gosh, I can't even explain how amazing she was through the whole process.”
– Montana Caregiver

Innovation

- Implemented frontier/rural patient navigation program serving patients and caregivers from multiple states.
- Established successful relationship between HCI patient navigator and key staff at affiliate hospitals in WY and MT to ensure smooth care transitions for patients and caregivers.
- Used a health educator model for patient navigation.

Implications for Sustainable Practice

- Impactful Domains:** This project is making a significant impact on the Engaged Community and Workflow Integration domains.
- Supporting Evidence:** An engaged Leadership Committee guides our work in both domains. The committee has identified internal and external partners to collaborate with the project team. They have also connected the project team to key workflow integration experts.
- Challenges:** Time it takes to implement changes to the EMR due to competing priorities within the organization.
- Addressing Challenges:** Identify champions to advocate for program projects.

Next Steps:

- Ensure program meets outcome objectives.
- Secure institutional support to fund frontier/rural program in 2025 and beyond.
- Expand frontier/rural program to ID and NV residents.

Acknowledgement of funding: This project is supported by a patient navigation capacity-building grant from the American Cancer Society.



Project Design/Methods

- Created program that provides frontier/rural patients equitable access to state-of-the-art cancer care and supportive services that improve outcomes of patients coming to HCI from UT, MT, and WY based on experience from existing patient navigation programs.
- Formed a leadership committee comprised of 23 health professionals from HCI and affiliate hospitals.
- Hired and trained Amelia Thelin as frontier/rural patient navigator.
- Conducted three frontier/rural focus groups of patients, caregivers, and health professionals from UT, MT, and WY to identify top barriers to care that they are facing.
- Piloted frontier/rural patient navigation program.
- Established metric and data collection in Epic and other systems.