Distress screening is a requirement for accreditation by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer and is recommended as standard of care by the National Comprehensive Cancer Network. The Cancer Committee of the Siteman Cancer Center recommends screening every patient every visit, with modifications as clinically indicated.

Assess patient’s distress using the Distress Thermometer (0-10 scale) during vitals assessment.

If distress screen is positive (score 6 or above):
- Notify the medical team regarding positive screen and problem area(s).
- Note score in the vitals section of the medical record.
- Ask the patient to identify the relevant problem area(s).
- Note in the medical record any problem area(s) the patient identifies.
- Medical team triages patient as appropriate and documents action taken.

If distress screen is negative (score 5 or below):
- Note score in the vitals section of the medical record.

See back page for number instructions.
Distress Screening Protocol for Adult Cancer Patients

1. Assess distress by showing the patient the laminated Distress Thermometer and giving this instruction: “Using this scale, please tell me the number that best describes how much distress you have been experiencing in the past week, including today.”

2. If the patient asks what is meant by distress, respond: “Distress is unpleasant feelings or emotions that interfere with your ability to cope with illness.”

3. Identify problem area(s) by showing the patient the laminated Problem List (on the back of the Distress Thermometer) and giving this instruction: “Please tell me if any of the following has been a problem for you in the last week, including today. You can choose more than one.” Then read the problem areas: “Practical problems, Family problems, Emotional problems, Spiritual concerns, Physical problems, or Other problems.” Tell the patient “Your nurse or physician will discuss this/these issue(s) with you.”

4. The medical team will triage the patient as they normally would. Suggested triage is as follows:
   - For Practical problems, refer to social work
   - For Family problems, refer to social work or counseling service
   - For Emotional problems, refer to counseling service
   - For Spiritual concerns, refer to patient’s religious resource or spiritual care service
   - For Physical problems, medical team will further assess and/or treat

5. The medical team documents action taken in response to positive distress screen. Common actions include: educating the patient, counseling the patient, referring the patient.

For more information about distress screening at the Siteman Cancer Center, please contact Dr. Teresa Deshields, chair of the Distress Screening Taskforce, at 314-454-7474.

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