

Supporting resource

The role of patient navigation in IPN management programmes



People with incidental pulmonary nodules (IPNs) often require additional investigations, specialist referrals and ongoing surveillance involving multiple healthcare professionals and services. Without clear coordination and oversight, there can be delays in assessment and follow-up. **Patient navigation helps people move through the health system by coordinating care, facilitating communication, providing information and support, and ensuring that follow-up care is received.** Navigation can be delivered by dedicated staff or through software-based systems. Evidence from established IPN programmes shows that navigation models improve follow-up, support guideline-concordant management, strengthen multidisciplinary collaboration and enhance efficiency.²

The table below summarises patient navigation functions that support IPN programmes. Use it to consider which patient navigation approaches may be appropriate for your programme.

Component of patient navigation	Relevance to IPN programme
Identification and triage	This ensures people with newly identified nodules are reviewed and directed to the appropriate care pathway. Nodule navigators can be trained to accurately triage referrals, interpret CT scans and recommend next steps using simulation-based learning, real clinical cases and immediate feedback.³
Education and communication	Patient navigators help people understand their nodule, its risk of malignancy, and recommended follow-up care; and support engagement in care. Providing tailored education also helps reduce health inequities by addressing barriers faced by underserved populations.^{4 5}
Service efficiency and quality improvement	Navigators help promote the consistent implementation of clinical pathways and improve efficiency.² For example, implementation of a nurse-led lung nodule service at Oxford University Hospitals improved IPN management through structured processes, multidisciplinary collaboration and standardised referral pathways, reducing waiting times and improving follow-up.⁶

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Care coordination and follow-up	Navigator-facilitated care coordination helps people adhere to recommended follow-up care. Navigators also help manage and facilitate transitions between multidisciplinary clinics and specialists, helping prevent people with nodules from getting 'lost' during complex follow-up processes.⁴ This is especially important for people whose nodules are detected in settings outside of their usual health system (such as through an emergency department) and people who have no fixed address.²

References

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