

Caring Calls in the Time of Covid-19

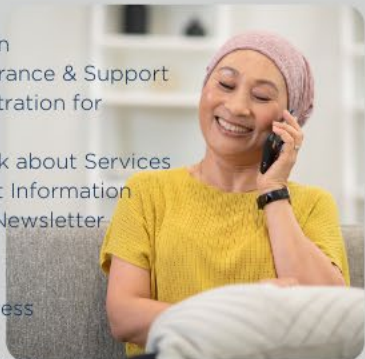
ABOUT THE DEMPSEY CENTER

The mission of the Dempsey Center is to make life better for people impacted by cancer. We provide a haven of support for cancer patients, their loved ones, and care partners using a collaborative and holistic approach that meets the client where they are in their cancer journey. Services include: Complementary Therapies, Nutrition & Movement/Fitness consultations and classes, Meditation & Mindfulness, Counseling & Support Groups, Youth & Family Services, and Educational Programs, and all services are provided at no cost to the client.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Dempsey Center closed its physical doors in Lewiston and South Portland, ME on March 16, 2020. And on March 31, 2020 the Dempsey Center opened its third, virtual center-- Dempsey Connects. Simultaneously, staff initiated a program called Caring Calls to provide continuity of connection, meet client needs, and minimize isolation during this uncertain time.

OBJECTIVES:

- Reduce Isolation
- Provide Reassurance & Support
- Facilitate Registration for Programming
- Solicit Feedback about Services
- Update Contact Information
- Enroll in Email Newsletter Distribution
- Assess Needs
- Screen for Distress
- Initiate Internal & External Referrals



METHODS:

Staffing

The program was delivered by non-clinical staff members who had access to the expertise of the Dempsey Center professional team for more complex situations. In this way, social workers and counselors were able to maintain their clinical responsibilities.

Caring Calls Training

Dempsey Center staff with various expertise collaborated to create a training that included:

- Reflective listening
- Open-ended vs. close-ended questions
- Agenda setting
- Boundary maintenance
- Scope of practice
- Distress screening
- SOAP charting



Structuring a Call

Staff were encouraged to "meet the client where they are" and were provided with a flexible call template.

- Introduction and agenda setting
 - "Is this a good time to talk?"
 - "I am calling to assure you that even though our doors are closed to visitors, we are here and working. I want to give you an update about Dempsey Center programs and talk about how the Dempsey Center can best support you."
- Verification of contact information
 - "What is the best way to contact you?"
- Assess technology gaps
 - "Do you have access to the internet?"
- Share information about Dempsey Connects
- Solicit feedback
 - "What has been your experience of the Dempsey Center so far?"
- Assess client needs
 - "What are ways the Dempsey Center can help you right now?"
- Enroll in programming
- Refer as needed to internal Dempsey Center services such as nutritional consults, bereavement counseling, Maine Cancer Mentors and external services such as 211Maine, their oncology providers, and the Warmline
- Summarize and arrange follow-up

THE DEMPSEY CENTER

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RESULTS:

The Caring Calls program resulted in 2740 calls and 1260 conversations between March 31, 2020 and January 31, 2021. The majority of clients were called 1 or 2 times. Approximately 10% of clients received 3 calls and 5% of clients received more than 4 calls. All client data was updated for each contact.

HERE'S WHAT OUR CLIENTS HAD TO SAY:

- "You are the only person I've spoken to this week."
- "It's really good to know that you're there if I need anything."
- "Thank you so much for checking in. It means a lot to me to know that you care."
- "I don't really need or want to speak with a counselor, but I'd really like to touch base every few weeks."



CONCLUSION:

The Caring Calls program was successful in keeping clients connected and addressing issues of isolation during the pandemic, by providing a warm, caring voice during a time of great uncertainty. Caring Calls created a smooth transition to the virtual platform, Dempsey Connects, and a way to assess and meet client needs.

Based on the success of the Caring Calls program, the Dempsey Center has created a new standard work process. New clients are now contacted by phone post-Dempsey Center Orientation at 30 days, 90 days, and 1 year. This keeps the client feeling connected, allows them to share any changes or updates that may have occurred, and Dempsey Center staff to suggest appropriate additional services. The use of non-clinical trained staff and skilled volunteers makes the program sustainable.

Additionally, the Caring Calls training and structure has been shared with other cancer support programs so they may replicate the program.