

About the Clinical Oncology Patients' Liaison Group

What is the COPLG?

The Clinical Oncology Patients' Liaison Group (COPLG) of The Royal College of Radiologists was established by the Faculty of Clinical Oncology in 1997. It is concerned with the treatment by radiotherapy or drug treatments of people with cancer.

Who sits on the COPLG?

There are eight lay members, four medical members and two ex-officio members. Anyone who has had cancer, or cared for someone with cancer, or who has experience or skills relevant to the COPLG's aims, can apply to become a lay member. All members are appointed for three years, renewable for an additional year by agreement, to run from September each year.

Whom do we represent?

Members of the COPLG are not acting as representatives of organisations, of specific groups of people or of particular kinds of cancer. They bring their individual experience of cancer and their own views to the group to help improve cancer treatment for everyone.

What do we do?

The COPLG exists to communicate the patients' perspective to the College so that the College's activities, and those of its members, are planned and carried out with an informed understanding of what patients need, want and feel.

There is much very high quality information available for patients on every aspect of cancer. As well as national organisations such as Cancer Backup, there are charities providing patient information on specific types of cancer. Many hospitals have their own leaflets and support groups. For this reason, **the activities of the COPLG are directed mainly toward influencing the ways in which healthcare professionals provide treatment and communicate with patients and their families**, rather than providing patient information. For instance, we have conducted surveys of chemotherapy and radiotherapy departments and published booklets for managers and staff on ways of making their departments more patient-friendly.

We also lobby for change at government level – for instance, against prescription charges for the drugs needed to counter the effects of chemotherapy, and respond to government consultation papers on health and medical issues.

We do not become involved in individual cases or in local patient liaison groups.

What kinds of people can become lay members?

Anyone who has been personally touched by cancer, as a patient or a carer, or who has experience relevant to the group's work, can apply. We welcome members of any age,

sex or ethnic group, wherever they live in the UK (travel expenses to meetings are paid). We do not normally appoint people with a background in healthcare as lay members, since this would alter the balance of the group.

It helps if you are a confident person who is at ease in meetings and not afraid to express your opinions.

How much work is involved?

The COPLG meets in London three times a year. There is some reading of College and other relevant documents to be done between meetings and lay members share projects such as writing booklets with the medical members, each person being responsible for a small part. Lay members are also asked to comment on consultation papers from the government and other bodies on issues that will affect patients. No-one is expected to take on more than they are comfortable with.

Sol Mead
Chair, COPLG
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