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Contribution ID: 63

Type: 1 - Scientific Poster

A nominal group technique to achieve consensus regarding the integration of a physical activity pathway in Irish cancer care

Thursday 23 July 2026 12:40 (20 minutes)

Introduction:

STEPs (Supporting cancer Treatment with Exercise Pathways) is a physical activity (PA) support programme for people who have, or have had, cancer. The aim of this study was to conduct a nominal group technique (NGT) to achieve consensus among key stakeholders regarding i) barriers to the integration of STEPs within usual cancer care in two Irish hospitals, and ii) solutions to overcome barriers identified.

Methods:

The NGT was conducted online via Zoom in February 2025 with 11 oncology experts, including people with a lived experience of cancer, medical professionals and academics. After reviewing the pathway, experts silently generated ideas regarding barriers and solutions, and shared their ideas sequentially in the subsequent phase. Responses were clarified and experts confirmed which items should feature for ranking. Experts ranked the challenges and solutions in order of importance in the final stage. A final group discussion occurred to review ranked items.

Results:

Challenges to integrating STEPs in clinical cancer care included: i) defining which patient cohort(s) STEPs could best support as influenced by people's readiness to engage in PA and the extent of treatment burden experienced, ii) determining who is best placed within the multidisciplinary team to initiate conversations about PA, iii) limited clinical time and space for supporting and administering the programme, and iv) the completion of follow-up re-assessments in-person. Solutions to support the effective integration of the programme included: i) clearly defining cohorts who would be eligible to engage with STEPs, ii) identifying and supporting key healthcare professionals to initiate PA discussions, iii) securing clinical team buy-in to STEPs integration, and iv) incorporating flexible delivery and assessment options (e.g. remote support) within STEPs.

Conclusion:

The NGT process generated consensus-based, actionable recommendations for implementing STEPs. These findings will guide STEPs implementation as part of a two-arm non-randomised trial in 2026.

Keywords

Cancer care; Physical activity pathway

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

Abstract submitters declaration

yes

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Session Classification: Poster Session