

Advancing Care in Renal Cell Carcinoma: Earlier Treatment, Better Outcomes, and Stronger Support for Patients

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Renal cell carcinoma (RCC) has seen remarkable scientific progress over the past decade. Advances in immunotherapy, targeted agents, and combination strategies have reshaped the treatment landscape and transformed outcomes for many patients. Yet for people living with the most common form of kidney cancer, clinical progress alone does not tell the whole story. The International Kidney Cancer Coalition (IKCC) released their 2025 Global Patient Survey, finding that 85% of kidney cancer patients experienced emotional wellbeing challenges, from scan anxiety and strains on interpersonal relationships, to feelings of isolation and uncertainty about the future. Despite this, many never raise these issues with their care team.

For those working in this area every day, the challenge is clear. If the past decade was defined by expanding treatment options, the next must also be defined by how effectively we use them, ensuring patients can access the most appropriate and effective treatment earlier in their journey, while also supporting the people behind the diagnosis and integrating emotional wellbeing into quality RCC care.

RCC is no longer a 'one size fits all' disease: subtypes behave and respond differently, presenting unique clinical challenges. For many people, RCC is still diagnosed at an advanced stage, narrowing treatment windows and increasing the urgency of having the right treatment in place as early as possible. While advances in immunotherapy and targeted agents have transformed many patient journeys, outcomes still vary, reinforcing the importance of selecting and initiating the most effective treatment at the right time, rather than delaying optimal care. At the same time, the emotional burden of living with RCC, navigating treatment decisions, managing side effects, and coping with fear of recurrence, is often overlooked within health systems that are primarily structured around clinical endpoints.

Scientific momentum is strong; the challenge now is ensuring that progress translates into real-world impact – supporting clinicians to feel confident in treatment decisions and enabling patients to benefit from effective therapies as early as possible to improve both outcomes and outlooks.

Across global oncology discussions, several shared priorities are increasingly shaping the future of RCC care.

Understanding the Full Patient Experience:

First, we must move beyond clinical outcomes to understand the complete impact of RCC on people's lives. Traditional evidence frameworks, while essential, rarely capture the emotional and psychological dimensions of the disease. Real-world evidence, patient-reported outcomes, and qualitative research can help close these gaps, offering deeper insight into how patients feel, cope, and what support they need at each stage of their journey.

Embedding Quality of Life into how we Generate Evidence:

Second, the rise of increasingly complex treatment strategies calls for new methodological approaches that place quality of life at their core. Adaptive trial designs, platform studies, and the earlier integration of patient-reported and quality-of-life endpoints offer opportunities to build a more complete picture of treatment value, one that reflects what matters most to patients, not just tumor response.

Keeping Systems in Step with Patient Needs:

Third, regulatory and health technology assessment (HTA) processes must evolve to recognize the full burden of RCC, including its emotional toll, while ensuring that patients can access the most appropriate treatments at the right time in their journey, without unnecessary delays or sequencing barriers. Emerging frameworks, such as joint clinical assessments in Europe, create potential for more aligned, timely evaluations, if implemented in ways that reflect the holistic realities of living with RCC and value emotional wellbeing as a meaningful outcome.

The patient experience must be central to every aspect of care. Living with RCC often means navigating profound uncertainty: treatment choices, side-effect burden, and long-term quality of life. Patients consistently remind us that value is not only clinical — it is also practical, emotional, and deeply personal. Yet far too many people never discuss these struggles with family, friends, or their healthcare teams. As this year's **World Kidney Cancer Day** campaign highlights, empowering patients to talk more openly about their emotional wellbeing and ensuring they can access support when they need it is a critical next step for the RCC community.

Progress in RCC depends on partnership. Researchers, clinicians, patient advocates, policymakers and industry each hold part of the solution. Within this evolving landscape, there is a clear opportunity for industry to play a responsible role — supporting clinicians with the evidence, tools and confidence needed to make informed decisions, and working in partnership to help ensure that the right patients receive the right treatment at the right time.

A more joined-up, future-proofed approach would include:

- Care pathways that integrate emotional and psychological support from diagnosis onwards
- Evidence frameworks that capture patient-reported wellbeing alongside clinical endpoints
- Access to psycho-oncology services that reduces geographic disparities in support availability
- Partnership models that embed the patient voice, including emotional needs, from discovery through delivery

The goal is simple: to ensure that every person with RCC, no matter where they live, is supported not only in their treatment but in their emotional wellbeing throughout the entire journey.

Engagement in these debates is not optional. By stepping forward constructively, responsibly, and with humility, organizations can help shape a system that matches the urgency felt by patients and clinicians alike.

The future of RCC care will not be defined by a single breakthrough. It will be defined by how effectively the community ensure existing advances are used to their full potential — reaching patients earlier, improving outcomes, and addressing both the clinical and emotional dimensions of the disease.

If we collectively commit to smarter evidence, stronger partnerships, and a more holistic view of what good care looks like, the next chapter of RCC does not need to resemble the last.

People living with RCC deserve a faster, fairer, more compassionate system — one that enables

timely access to the most effective treatments, supports clinicians in making confident decisions, and recognizes patients as whole people, not just diagnoses. Across the oncology ecosystem, we each have a role to play in making that vision a reality.

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