



### Diagnosis

### Emotional Impact

### Treatment/Side Effects

### Survivorship

### Patient Stories

## The Patient's First Visit

During a cancer patient's first visit to the oncologist, they are often given a postcard depicting a thermometer with a scale of 1-10.

The patient is asked to self-evaluate their level of distress choosing a point along the Thermometer, where "1" means a very low level of distress and "10" denotes a very high distress level.

If a patient indicates a "4" or higher, it's recommended that they meet with the on-site social worker, if one is available.

## Genesis of the Thermometer

Today's patients often wonder - - as you might expect - - who invented this Thermometer and whether it's useful.

From the advent of modern day cancer care, in the mid 1950s, it took four decades before there was a broad-based recognition among oncologists that much greater attention should be paid to the mental and emotional suffering of a cancer patient.

To examine the issue more closely in 1997, a task force was formed among members of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), a group of the top cancer centers in the U.S.

## Making Progress

It is likely the task force began its work by asking these two questions: First, what should science be measuring? Second, what tool could be devised to take measurements?

## What's Being Measured?

We can imagine there was spirited debate among the task force as to whether they should be measuring the patient's anxiety, stress level, or maybe their depression. Their final decision was to focus on a single word: Distress

The NCCN then defined distress as encompassing a wide range of factors - - from the emotional to the psychological - - that compromise a patient's **ability to cope** with the burdens of their cancer journey.

## The Measurement Tool

So, back to the Thermometer. No matter what new problem a scientist is studying, the first step in many cases, is to take measurements.

In studying the distress condition among cancer patients, the Thermometer has become a widely accepted measuring stick, proven to be a reliable and easy-to-use device.

After the Thermometer scale is completed by the patient, the story continues.

## Fighting Chance at Phillips Family Cancer Center, Southampton

The Fighting Chance-affiliated social worker has her own private office suite. Patients who arrive, courtesy of their thermometer referral, get quality time with the social worker on a closed-door basis.

If it's determined that more extensive counseling would be helpful, they are referred to our Sag Harbor Clinic where there are more counselors, also in a relaxed, cozy, setting.



*Fighting Chance Southampton Office  
in Phillips Family Cancer Center*

## Follow-Up is Important

The main drawback of the distress Thermometer is not its accuracy, but, rather, the follow-up.

- In some cases, a social worker is not employed by a cancer center, or just too busy, so a follow-up meeting with a patient in distress is problematic.

- If a social worker is free for a visit, they rarely have their own office, so a visit may be just 15 minutes in the hallway.

## Fighting Chance Social Workers Always Available

Do patients have any other options? Well, on Eastern Long Island, there is one: The Fighting Chance Clinic. Plenty of oncology social workers are available. All visits are in comfortable, private offices, and always free-of-charge.

Fighting Chance has offices  
in Sag Harbor and at the  
Phillips Family Cancer Center  
in Southampton.

For more details, or information  
please call 631.725.4646  
Visit our website at  
[www.fightingchance.org](http://www.fightingchance.org)