In the Wake of Medicare Modernization Act Changes, A Moral Wake-Up

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It is my privilege to welcome you to the first issue of a very unique periodical. The launch of *The Journal of Oncology Practice (JOP)* comes at a difficult time for oncologists. We are facing some rather significant changes in the way payments are made compared to a year ago, thanks to provisions of the Medicare Modernization Act that became effective January 2005. Many ASCO constituents are very upset about these provisions, and there are times that I have been remonstrative about them as well.

But in thinking about what to say here, especially since the *JOP* encompasses in its mission a discussion of the business aspects of oncology, I decided that this may be an apt moment to put things into perspective. When we trained as physicians, our primary goal was to provide excellent patient care. Our training prepared us to excel in the science and art of medicine. And while the financing issues are certainly very important—we all require adequate funding to run our practices—I believe that if we maintain a focus on providing high-quality patient care, and on seeking professional enrichment for ourselves, we will weather our way through the vicissitudes of 2005.

This is not to say that we are complacent in the face of important shortfalls in reimbursements for the many

non-procedural aspects of cancer care. We at ASCO are working with patient advocacy organizations to ensure that the federal government and other health insurers understand the importance of holistic cancer care. When we are paid for pushing chemotherapy or performing a CT scan, but not for the additional time spent explaining things to our patients, there is something wrong with the reimbursement system. ASCO affiliates and patient groups have been prominent in reminding the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and all other payers, of the value of cognitive services—caring

services—and we are hopeful that these efforts will be rewarded by enhancements in reimbursements for all essential non-procedural services that help our cancer patients.

I extend my congratulations to the new editor of *JOP*, and my very best to *JOP* readers and my colleagues. There are a few publications that speak strictly to the business side of medicine, and a number that address the science and art of medicine. But until now, none has bridged this gap. In this task, the *JOP* occupies an important niche, especially in today's difficult atmosphere for health care providers and patients alike. I am sure, given the high standards that ASCO maintains in all of its activities and sponsorships, that this publication will prove to be a valuable resource for ASCO members and our professional associates.