The American Society of Hematology: Advancing Knowledge and Treatment of Blood Disorders

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The American Society of Hematology (ASH), with its 14,000 members, is the world's largest professional society concerned with the causes and treatment of blood disorders. Since its founding in 1958, ASH has played an active and important role in the development of hematology as a discipline. ASH has sponsored its

Annual Meeting, which is held the first or second weekend in December and is the premier annual education and scientific event in the field of hematology. ASH also publishes *Blood*, which is the most-cited peer-reviewed publication in the field.

The mission of ASH is to further the understanding, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disorders affecting the blood, bone marrow, and the immunologic, hemostatic and vascular systems, by promoting research, clinical care, education, training, and advocacy in hematology.

The membership of ASH includes basic scientists (27% of ASH members are PhDs) to clinical investigators (24% of ASH members) and practicing clinicians (42% of ASH's membership). The Annual Meeting and ASH's journal, *Blood*, reflect the diversity in scientific and clinical issues in hematology.

For several years, ASH has been progressively more active in advocacy efforts related to increasing programmatic support for research funding and training with National Institutes of Health leadership at institutes with interests in hematologic research, including the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, the National Cancer Institute, and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. More recently, ASH has become involved with the National Institute on Aging, especially as regards the complex area of anemia in the elderly.

Because of the coupling of pediatric and internal medicine training programs in hematology and oncology, it is no wonder that over 25% of ASCO members are members of ASH, making it the largest-represented medical society in

ASCO. Currently 40% of ASH are also members of ASCO. The interest within ASH in malignant hematology can be discerned from the fact that 56% of the 5,800 abstracts presented at the 2004 ASH Annual Meeting were related to hematologic malignancies or hematopoietic stem cell transplantation. Because of this overlap of interests and membership between ASH and ASCO, the two societies work together on projects concerning the practice of hematology and medical oncology. These projects include:

- issues involved in reimbursement
- participation in the Current Procedures and Terminology (CPT) editorial process that assigns new codes defining the services we provide,
- participation in the AMA's RUC (Relative Value Scale Update Committee) that develops relative value recommendations for reimbursement purposes to CMS,
 - Two recent examples of ASH/ASCO cooperation in the above-mentioned processes include the definition and valuation of the new infusion codes and participation in the RUC's five-year review that will focus on the valuation of evaluation and management codes.
- jointly endorse proposals that the subspecialty adult medical oncology and hematology Fellowship Training Programs participate in the National Residence Matching Program Fellowship Match in 2006,
- jointly organize an annual meeting for Medicare hematology and oncology carrier advisors, and
- cosponsor FDA workshops on clinical trial endpoints that might have potential in supporting regular or accelerated approval of products that could be used to treat malignant disease.

These are just a few examples of continuing cooperative efforts between the societies. The complexity and challenges of reimbursement and the regulatory environment and most importantly the challenges of understanding and treating hematologic malignancies make natural partners between ASH and ASCO. I have personally seen this partnership grow over the last few years. I am certain more cooperative ventures await.

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