State Affiliate News

Spotlight on the Association of Northern California Oncologists

By José Luis González, ANCO Executive Director

The Association of Northern California Oncologists (ANCO) was organized in 1990. ANCO currently represents approximately 260 medical oncologists and hematologists throughout Northern California and adjacent states. While the majority of our members are community-based physicians, ANCO also represents the medical oncologists of the regional academic cancer centers—Stanford University, UC Davis, and UC San Francisco—through its institutional membership program. Finally, ANCO currently has 34 corporate members from the pharmaceutical and oncology-consulting marketplace.

ANCO is a state/regional affiliate of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), a member of the Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC), a member of the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS), a partner with the Medical Oncology Association of Southern California (MOASC) in the California Oncology Consortium (COC), a member with several other state oncology and oncology practice manager societies of the Hematology Oncology Leadership Network (HOLN), and a member of the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS).

ANCO provides a forum for the exchange of ideas, data, and knowledge and represents the interests of oncologists and their patients before state and federal government agencies, regional and national oncology and medical societies, and insurance and pharmaceutical companies. To these ends, ANCO disseminates information on its Web site (www.anco-online.org), and via weblog, e-mail, FAX broadcast, and the biweekly ANCO FAX News; sponsors clinical education meetings for physicians and nurses and professional education meetings for both oncologists and managers; and, advocates on behalf of physicians and their patients before regional and national organizations (ie, government, private, and corporate).

ANCO's policy decisions and directions are set by its governing Board of Directors. ANCO attempts to influence national policies by representation at ACCC and at ASCO's Clinical Practice Committee meetings. We have found it effective to be represented at the California Medical Association (CMA) meetings via our Sacramento-based advocacy firm. We routinely participate in the National Health Information Center (NHIC)/Medicare Carrier Advisory Committee, and communicate with private insurance companies as needed. ANCO, in cooperation with the Medical Oncology Association of Southern California is launching the California Oncology Political Action Committee, or CalCancerPAC, in 2005.

ANCO organizes an ambitious educational meeting schedule each year. Our clinical education meetings include the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium and American Society of Hematology and ASCO Highlights meetings. ANCO helps to organize Stanford's annual Northern California Tumor Board at Silverado, and disseminates information about several clinical education programs each year organized by our institutional members. ANCO is a cooperating state society for ASCO's Best of ASCO in San Francisco. Recent meetings have focused on changes and challenges posed by the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA). ANCO is also launching regular audio conferences for its practice managers. Nonmembers are welcome to attend; information is available on ANCO's Web site.

ANCO also holds an Annual Meeting for physicians, nurses, and practice managers. We hear from national and local faculty on issues impacting medical oncology practice. The 2005 Annual Meeting will present the latest legislative/regulatory information regarding Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS's) Competitive Acquisition Program (CAP), explore the impact of MMA on managed care contracting, and discuss end-of-life care and decision making.

The ANCO FAX News, and Association news, is faxed to each member practice approximately every other week. Recent issues may be downloaded from the ANCO Web site. In addition, the COC ListServ, an e-mail based communications system for general and clinical information, and ANCO FAX broadcasts keep members and others up to date on important information to oncology practices. ANCO also publishes an updated Directory of Members annually. Besides a comprehensive listing of ANCO members and managers, the Directory also includes a list of corporate member reimbursement hotlines and assistance programs. Finally, ANCO surveys its members regularly on issues of importance (eg, patient satisfaction, staff salaries). An MMA Impact Survey is being conducted in the second quarter of 2005.

The ANCO Board of Directors continues to seek ways to make membership more beneficial to the practicing oncologist and to identify additional membership benefits. Besides the benefits derived from its advocacy, educational, and information dissemination activities, ANCO members also benefit from discounted pharmaceutical pricing via the COC and HOLN. Additional value-added, tangible membership benefit programs are being explored.

Jose Luis Gonzalez has more than 25 years experience in association management at the Institute of Mathematical Statistics, and Association of Northern California Oncologists.