From the ASCO President

Nancy E. Davidson, MD

Focusing on a Shared Goal

ASCO represents oncologists who work in a wide range of settings and subspecialties. However, in reality, we are all part of one oncology community, focused on a shared goal of enhancing care for individuals with cancer. All of us face challenges in achieving our goal, and we must work together to address several significant issues, including the need to bring science into all aspects of care, the impending shortage of oncologists, the increased costs of care, and the imperative need to foster the development of new cancer specialists.

Molecular oncology is changing the way we practice, and we must all work to ensure that the discoveries of today become the therapies of tomorrow. The concept of personalized cancer medicine is within our reach, and we must take advantage of all opportunities to learn more about cancer biology and contribute to its translation into novel therapeutics and diagnostics. ASCO will continue its heightened focus on translational cancer research by providing a variety of educational opportunities at the Annual Meeting and at other smaller, thematic meetings.

While we focus on scientific discovery to advance the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, we must not lose sight of the need to harness emerging technology related to other aspects of cancer care. The use of electronic health records (EHRs) offers an incredible potential to improve the quality of oncology practice and enable us to provide better care to our patients. ASCO is working to ensure that its members consider the potential for EHRs in increasing productivity, reducing costs, and enhancing patient and provider satisfaction. Now in its second year, the ASCO EHR Workgroup is responding to the growing demand within the Society for guidance on the selection and implementation of EHRs.

Enhancing practice productivity may help us address another crucial issue: a projected shortage of oncologists in the coming years. The findings of the ASCO Oncology Workforce Study indicate that by the year 2020, the demand for oncology services will increase by 48%, while the supply of services provided by oncologists will increase by only 14%.¹ ASCO established the Workforce Implementation Group, a group of 21 members with expertise in clinical practice, cancer education, research, and oncology training. The group, led by Michael Goldstein, MD, and Dean Bajorin, MD, is charged with developing recommendations to address the projected shortfall. Information about the Oncology Workforce Study and the Workforce Implementation Group is available on ASCO.org (www.asco.org/workforce).

Emerging technology, novel therapeutics, and new diagnostic techniques come at a high price, and the costs of cancer treatment have increased dramatically throughout the last decade. As a result, many patients are unable to afford the most advanced care. Oncologists are often uncertain about how to address costs with their patients. According to a recent survey of 167 medical oncologists, only 37% of respondents said that they “always” discuss costs with their patients.² The costs of cancer care are an overriding concern for all oncologists as well as patients. We owe it to our patients not only to discuss costs with them but also to advocate for policies that control costs and that provide access to optimum care for all patients, regardless of financial status. The ASCO Cost of Cancer Care Task Force, led by chair Lowell Schnipper, MD, will help set the path for ASCO’s efforts in this area.

The future of cancer care depends on our ability to attract, train, and retain the next generation of oncologists to continue our work. Thus, it is vital that we continue to foster the careers of clinical and translational investigators to lead these critical scientific discovery and translational efforts. Research funding is at a critical low. The ASCO Foundation Grants Program sponsors young and midlevel investigators, and I am so pleased that the ASCO Clinical Practice Committee invested in the future of our field by sponsoring a Young Investigator Award (YIA) in 2007 and plans to sponsor a 2008 YIA. As a 1986 YIA recipient, I can attest personally to the value of such an award for the individual, our cancer community, and, ultimately, our patients.

As we close out the year, I look forward with you to the wealth of ASCO educational opportunities in 2008. Let us commit ourselves to working together as a single oncology community to meet the challenge of helping our patients obtain the best possible cancer care.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy E. Davidson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "D".

DOI: 10.1200/JOP.0761001

References

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2. Shrag D, Hanger M: Medical oncologists' views on communicating with patients about chemotherapy costs: A pilot survey. *J Clin Oncol* 25:233-237, 2007