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Communication in cancer prevention and control

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It has become virtually a truism that communication is the glue that holds us together, solidifying relationships within and across families, social structures, distance, professional hierarchies, and cultures. In the oncologic context, being able to communicate effectively has been shown to facilitate the transfer of information and needed facts about cancer prevention and control from person to person, between persons and providers, and between persons and the health care system and the broader community.

Assessing and addressing individuals' communication needs is increasingly essential in an era where computer technology has dramatically expanded the ability to present and frame information for specific subgroups of people. The advent of web-based channels of information delivery has also allowed for the packaging of information in ways that can convey risk feedback in a supportive fashion, involve and mobilize the person's social support network, and provide incentives, cues, and resources for motivating and sustaining high quality health protective decisions, action plans, and behaviors..

However, the combined promise of behavioral science and computer technology for improving access to personally relevant and accurate information, enhancing informed health choices, and ultimately improving people's health status, has not yet been fully realized. Therefore, in March 2008, the Cancer Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Society of Behavioral Medicine commissioned a pre-conference scientific meeting on Communication in Cancer. Prevention and Control. This meeting was co-sponsored by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), along with the Society of Behavioral Medicine and the American Cancer Society,

With the further support of the National Cancer Institute, the Cancer SIG organizing team invited manuscripts from the meeting participants, including the primary guest speakers as well as the break-out session roundtable participants, and has integrated them into this special issue. The NCI has long recognized that an understanding of the basic principles of cancer communication at the micro (clinical) to macro (media) levels, in conjunction with the design and evaluation of messaging channels for conveying that information, is fundamental to cancer prevention and control, along the entire cancer continuum. In accordance with this comprehensive approach, each paper presents a distinctive, but complementary, view on the field of cancer and communication. The issues discussed range from a focus on communication patterns between people as they deal with their health care options and choices, to perspectives on how health care policy influences – and is reciprocally influenced by – available communication concepts, tools, and challenges. We asked the primary presenters to provide synthesized overviews of the specific areas that they had discussed at the pre-conference, and

we asked the breakout session participants to succinctly summarize the discussions of their assigned topics, resulting in more focused documents for inclusion.

The papers contained in this volume present the state of the science in cancer-related communication, and are geared to be equally useful for cancer researchers and providers. The overarching goal of this special issue is not only to distill out the existing evidence base on communication in cancer prevention and control, but also to provide a roadmap for future research and to strengthen multi-disciplinary collaborations. Accordingly, the roster of contributors includes both independent investigators and NCI staff, to gain perspective from the vantage points of their respective positioning in the field, and to work towards medling these viewpoints together.