

## ACCC's 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Oncology Presidents' Retreat ... and More

**ACCC's** 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Oncology Presidents' Retreat, held Jan. 31-Feb. 1 in McLean, Va., drew leaders from 40 state oncology societies as well as representatives from national oncology associations and patient advocacy groups. Foremost on the minds of these oncology leaders were legislative and regulatory changes that could severely



Among the oncology leaders at the ACCC Presidents' Retreat were (on the left) George Kovach, M.D., president of the Iowa Oncology Society; Patrick J. Donovan, M.D., FACP, past president of the Arizona Clinical Oncology Society; and (at right) ACCC President Edward L. Braud, M.D.

impact patient access to quality cancer care, including changes to average wholesale price (AWP) for chemotherapy drugs and physician practice expense issues.

"We can't lower payment for drugs without appropriate increases in payment for services," said Joseph S. Bailes, M.D., F.A.C.P., chief public policy liaison for the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO).

Charles Clapton, majority counsel for the House of Rep. Committee on Energy and Commerce, addressed the group and engaged in an extensive question and answer period. Rep. Tauzin is chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which has been working for several years

to ensure adequate reimbursement for chemotherapy drugs for oncologists.

"Congressman Tauzin wants to assure that Medicare beneficiaries have access to cancer treatment and that oncologists are reimbursed fairly so they can continue to practice medicine," said Clapton.

Also offering insight into the AWP issue was Don Thompson, director of Ambulatory Services Division at CMS. He said his agency is exploring administrative options to reform AWP, but did not provide details.

"CMS understands the difficulty of this issue, and if it were easy, it would have been solved a long time ago," said Thompson. "We are struggling with it."

"Oncologists did not create the current Medicare reimbursement system, yet they are being held accountable for some of the serious problems regarding drug margins," said Thompson. "What can we do to fix it [the reimbursement system]?" he asked.

According to Thompson, CMS Administrator Tom Scully has indicated on more than one occasion that he prefers that Congress provide a legislative solution. "If, however, Congress does not act, then CMS will take regulatory action." CMS would issue a proposed rule with a public comment period. "We hope that it does not come to that," Thompson added.

Thompson indicated that regulatory action on AWP reform by CMS would most likely be implemented by January 1, 2004, to coincide with the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule update.

On the issue of physician practice expense, refining the practice expense side of codes could occur in the proposed Physician Fee Schedule update for 2004. According to Thompson, Scully has said on

more than one occasion that CMS "wants to pay appropriately for the services."

Christian G. Downs, J.D., M.H.A., ACCC's deputy executive director, advised state oncology leaders that initiatives are underway to assure that patients will still have access to care at hospitals and practices five years from now, and that whatever reforms are developed will not break down the cancer care infrastructure.

ACCC's Oncology Presidents' Retreat also offered presentations on strategies for oncology practices to work more effectively with private payers, who are also squeezing reimbursement and plan benefits.

## www.accc-cancer.org Wins Prestigious Award

ACCC's web site received the 2002 *Medicine on the Net Web Excellence Awards* for a medical association. Judged by a panel of health care



experts, [www.accc-cancer.org](http://www.accc-cancer.org) was found to have an outstanding combination of excellent user interface, design, and content. Specifically, judges found ACCC's web site to

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be, "Clean and professional and very well organized...a great deal of new content that appears to be relevant...beautifully presented material...excellent navigation."

Each month more than 50,000 visitors visit the site, which provides the oncology health care community with the information they need to stay competitive, streamline services, improve reimbursement, and provide state-of-the-art, quality cancer care.

## Teaming Up Nurses and Physicians

**M**ore than 40 oncology nurses and leaders from state medical oncology societies gathered in Phoenix, Ariz., on Dec. 12-13, 2002, for the first annual ACCC State Society/Oncology Nursing Society Partnership Conference. The meeting was cosponsored by AstraZeneca and Merck & Company.

## Palliative Care Planning Program for ACCC Members

**ACCC** is partnering with The Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC) to bring ACCC members a series of articles and worksheets to help plan and develop a model palliative care program.

ACCC's Members-Only web

site (<http://www.accc-cancer.org/membersonly/>) now offers online resources to help cancer centers develop a business case for a palliative care program, including how to do a needs assessment and estimate patient volume. Four model palliative care programs are profiled, and links to CAPC's web site provide a myriad of other palliative care resources for hospitals and health systems interested in developing palliative care programs.



Participants at the conference worked on action plans that detailed specific legislative issues and advocacy activities each physician/nurse team would undertake over the next year. Shown here are (left to right) Vincent J. Picozzi, Jr., M.D., M.M.M., president of the Washington State Medical Oncology Society; Edythe C. Garvey, R.N., M.N., A.P.N., AOCN®, ONS state chapter representative from Reno, Nev.; and Mona Stage, ONS state health policy liaison from Seattle, Wash.



More discussions and team building at the Phoenix conference. Shown here are (left to right) Al B. Benson III, M.D., F.A.C.P., president of the Illinois Medical Oncology Society; ONS President Judy E. Lundgren, R.N., M.S.N., AOCN® from Arlington, Tex.; and Marnie McHale, R.N., M.S., AOCN®, ONS state health policy liaison from Chicago, Ill.



ACCC President Edward L. Braud, M.D., and Pearl B. Moore, R.N., M.N., F.A.A.N., chief executive officer of the Oncology Nursing Society, pose for the camera at the first annual ACCC State Society/Oncology Nursing Society Partnership Conference in Phoenix, Ariz.