

Becoming a Better Advocate Through Team Building

by Edward L. Braud, M.D.

In December 2002, I attended the first annual ACCC State Society/Oncology Nursing Society Partnership Conference in Phoenix, Ariz. For two days, more than 40 attendees learned how to become better advocates—especially at the state and local levels—and develop creative action plans. We brought physicians from state medical oncology societies together with oncology nurses from the same states. Our goal was to learn how to work together to help solve some of the critical issues facing oncology today, including access to quality cancer care and the workforce shortage. The meeting was cosponsored by AstraZeneca and Merck & Company.

ONS President Judy Lundgren, R.N., M.S.N., AOCN®, was on hand to welcome attendees. She and a panel of experts provided practical information to inspire and educate attendees on how to increase their involvement at the local, state, and federal government levels to affect health policy.

Day one of the workshop focused on building understanding between nurse and physician attendees. Participants were paired off by state, and each oncologist and oncology nurse team spent time developing an action plan that detailed specific legislative issues and advocacy activities the team would undertake over the next year. Teams planned to visit state and federal legislators to raise awareness about such issues as ensuring access to quality care for people with cancer and bolstering the nursing workforce.

Both physician and nurse atten-

dees learned the importance of working together to be effective advocates. Each party brings distinctive skills to the table. Through their state oncology societies, physicians bring a strong voice. Nurses offer a unique perspective since they spend most of their time with patients and are especially powerful in presenting patient stories to legislators and regulators.

Day two of the workshop focused on key issues facing the oncology community, including the lack of money allocated to the Nursing Reinvestment Act in the 107th Congress and reimbursement cuts that may threaten delivery of cancer care. Participants agreed to use the nurse/physician teams to

build strong coalitions at the state level and to start by creating consensus between ONS chapters and state medical oncology societies on these issues.

To ensure quality cancer care for our patients today and in the future, such alliances are crucial. Our job is to spread the word that, yes, we as physicians and

nurses *can* and *will* impact health care policy. We can make a difference in the leviathan that is our government.

Hopefully, the alliances and partnerships created at this meeting will one day soon influence the legislative and regulatory process. When we speak with one voice, we command power and respect on Capitol Hill as well as in state capitols. Ensuring that physicians and nurses are on the same page on issues that affect the oncology community is a critical first step to changing health care policy. 🗣️



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