

ACCC's 20th National Oncology Economics Conference

More than 450 participants attended ACCC's 20th National Oncology Economics Conference held Oct. 8-11, 2003, in San Diego, Calif. The meeting focused on economic/program management issues related to oncology care, with a special emphasis on how to cope with the expected changes in Medicare payments for cancer drugs and physician practice expenses that will go into effect in 2004.

Congress. In a general session on Oct. 9, Saira Sultan, J.D., ACCC's director of public policy, spoke about the legislative and regulatory issues affecting all cancer care providers. To an audience comprised of about 50 percent hospital-based cancer programs and 50 percent physician practices, Sultan addressed reimbursement issues in both settings and explained how "migration of patients between the two settings of care has turned out to be a critical concern for the entire oncology community."

Sultan shared with attendees how ACCC is working with Congress to reverse inadequate payments in the hospital outpatient setting, including a number of ACCC suggestions that were incorporated into both the House and Senate Medicare prescription drug coverage bills passed in June 2003. Last month, the 17 House and Senate conferees charged with reconciling differences between the two bills agreed to several provisions designed to restore Medicare reimbursement to drugs and biologics provided in the hospital outpatient setting. (An in-depth analysis of these provisions is found in "Issues" on page 9 of this journal.)

Calling reimbursement in the physician office setting "complex and not well understood by Congress," Sultan spoke about a proposal the oncology community submitted to

Congress last month that suggested reimbursement be transitioned from 95 percent of average wholesale price (AWP) to average sales price (ASP) plus 12 percent. Additionally, the proposal called for 85 percent of all savings realized during the four-year transition from AWP to ASP to be funneled back into practice expense.

Sultan described the prescription drug benefit as the "big elephant in the room" and said that "if we don't have a prescription drug benefit, then we do not have a reimbursement 'fix' for the hospital outpatient department or oncology care provided in the physician setting."

ACCC continues to monitor these issues, and the most current information is always available on ACCC's web site at www.accc-cancer.org.

Clinical. On Oct. 9, Margaret A. Tempero, M.D., president of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) and deputy director of the University of California San Francisco Comprehensive Cancer Center in San Francisco, Calif., spoke about improvements in the delivery of quality cancer care and advances in science.

"We [the oncology community] are at the end of a virtual fire hose of information that is pouring out of research, and the potential new molecular targets for cancer prevention and therapy are amazing," said Tempero. "But we still face problems including inadequate tissue banks, a declining pool of physician scientists (both laboratory and clinic based), and a very cumbersome regulatory process."

In the next decade or so, cancer care will focus much more on risk and risk management, with more interventions at an earlier stage in the disease process, Tempero said.

"This shift in cancer care means that clinicians will have to be trained differently," Tempero concluded. "And community cancer centers are



Above: ACCC President Cary A. Presant, M.D., presented ACCC's annual Clinical Research Award to Lillian M. Nail, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N. on Oct. 10, 2003. *Below:* ACCC's Annual Walk/Run was held on Oct. 8, 2003.

going to have to change over time to accommodate these trends.”

On Oct. 10, ACCC presented its annual Clinical Research Award to Lillian M. Nail, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N., at a special awards luncheon. A Rawlinson-endowed professor of nursing and senior scientist at the Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing in Portland, Ore., Nail is internationally known for her research on coping with cancer treatments and their side effects. The full text of Nail’s speech will be published in the January/February *Oncology Issues*.

Education and Networking.

The four-day conference featured many additional sessions, including a stimulating session on understanding and negotiating pricing with your pharmaceutical representatives; a session on providing excellent customer service and increasing your market share; and a session on how to measure the total value and contribution of your cancer service line. Again this year, popular roundtable sessions, in which small groups of individuals with similar interests shared innovative solutions to common problems, were featured.

Attendees enjoyed a number of networking opportunities in San Diego, including ACCC’s Annual Fun Walk/Run, the President’s Welcoming Reception, ACCC’s First Time/New Members Gathering, and a reception in the exhibit hall among more than 35 booths.

“What I enjoy most about ACCC’s meetings is the mix of training and networking,” said one attendee. “I get to attend timely educational sessions during the day, and at night I can talk with colleagues across the country who are going through the same trials and tribula-

tions that my cancer center is facing.”

Another attendee agreed with this sentiment. “It’s actually heartening to know that the problems facing my cancer center are not unique. Coming to ACCC’s conference and hearing about others in the same boat helps put everything into perspective. And if we’re going to continue to be able to care for our cancer patients, we [the oncology community] have to stand together and work for the changes we need from our government, from our private payers, and even from other organizations in the health care industry.”

ACCC’s 28th Annual National Conference will be held March 17-20, 2004 in Crystal City, Va. ■

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for sponsorship of program sessions and social events at the Association of Community Cancer Center’s 20th National Oncology Economics Conference.

Become Involved With ACCC!

ACCC’s Nominating Committee is looking for new talent for board and committee participation. The Nominating Committee is seeking interested individuals who would like to have a bigger role in ACCC’s multidisciplinary activities.

“As ACCC enters its 30th year of service as the premier education and advocacy organization for the cancer team, it’s an exciting time to volunteer,” said Albert B. Einstein, M.D., F.A.C.P., this year’s committee chair. “We want to hear from individuals interested in being a part of this dynamic association.”

“And once you’ve become involved with ACCC,” shared former ACCC president and Nominating Committee member Teresa Smith, R.N., M.S.N. “You’ll find that ACCC’s networking and educational opportunities, groundbreaking legislative efforts, and award-winning web site and publications will make you want to stay involved even past your board or committee term.”

Individuals interested in nominating candidates to the board or a committee position should contact Margaret May by phone: 301.984.9496, ext. 212 or email: mmay@acc-cancer.org. ■

The NCI Needs Your Help

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) Office of Education and Special Initiatives is looking for patients, family caregivers, and health care providers who are interested in participating in telephone focus groups and in-depth interviews. (The interviews will also

be conducted in Spanish.) This research will ensure that new NCI palliative-care-related educational products meet the needs of a diverse audience.

Among those qualified to participate in the NCI project are patients who have recurrent or stage III or IV cancer; family or friends who are currently providing care for some-

one in treatment for cancer; family or friends who have provided end-of-life care for someone who died from cancer within the last two years; and physicians who work with people with advanced cancer. Payment will be provided to all participants.

Interested persons should call toll free: 888.249.0029. ■