

Quality of Service

by Christian Downs, JD, MHA

PHOTOGRAPH/PICTUREQUEST

Recently, I went for a check up at one of the large academic medical centers here in Washington, D.C. As you would expect, they asked the usual questions: *Have you been tired? Any unexplained weight loss? Any family history of heart trouble? Let's get an EKG to make sure everything is ok.*

The physician left the room, and I waited for the nurse to roll in the EKG machine. And I waited. And I waited. Nearly 90 minutes passed before I received my EKG. This experience got me thinking about "quality of care," and its many shades of meaning.

When we think about quality of care, patient safety is foremost in our minds. In 1999 the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) report, *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System*, noted that between 44,000 and 98,000 Americans die each year because of medical errors, making such errors the fifth leading cause of death nationally. Then, in 2001, IOM released the equally troubling report, *Crossing the Quality Chasm*, which concluded that most Americans did not receive quality care—at least according to the standards of clinical evidence available at the time.

Patient safety and high-quality clinical care are two key facets of what we mean by "quality of care." But my EKG episode reflects yet another dimension of quality of care—*quality of service*.

For those working in cancer care settings today, quality of service is of particular interest. Not only are we serving patients who are struggling with one of the greatest challenges of their lives, we are doing so in an environment of constant change.



As we strive to provide the highest quality service to our patients, we face significant programmatic challenges including:

- A dwindling pool of oncology certified nurses
- Practice managers and hospital administrators struggling to provide quality care and maintain a health bottom line
- Physicians treating an increasing number of patients while keeping current with a growing amount of clinical and therapeutic information.

ACCC continues to support community cancer centers in the delivery of quality care—in all its dimensions. The Association, through its education and information programs, plays an active role in helping cancer care providers meet the challenge of providing high quality care head on. At ACCC's recent annual meeting in Alexandria, Va., we looked at several key areas related to quality of care.

Under the leadership of ACCC's new President E. Strode Weaver, FACHE, MBA, MHSA, the Association will continue to look at issues related to quality of care, paying particular attention to patient safety. Many of our efforts in this regard will be conducted by ACCC's Center for Provider Education. Still others will be disseminated through our web site at www.accc-cancer.org and our two national meetings—ACCC's Oncology Economics Meeting in Portland, Oregon, Sept. 13-16, 2005, and the National Annual Meeting in March 2006, in Washington, D.C.

Quality of care is essential to the patients for whom we care. And, unlike my EKG, it cannot wait. 📞

EVERYONE'S ASKING



- ◆ *How can we create greater efficiencies and a culture of safety for our patients?*
- ◆ *How can we continue to offer a full range of services, including palliative care, nutritional support, and social services?*
- ◆ *What will ASP be in the hospital setting?*
- ◆ *Is the Competitive Acquisition Program right for my practice?*
- ◆ *What are model programs and practices doing to increase patient and staff satisfaction?*

ACCC's National Oncology Economics Conference has the answers!

Partnering to Shape the Future of Cancer Care

**September 13-16, 2005
Doubletree Hotel & Executive Meeting Center Portland—Lloyd Center
Portland, Oregon**

And there's more...Partnering is also key to success, especially in times of reimbursement restraints. Joint ventures between hospital-based cancer programs and private oncology practices are becoming increasingly popular. But be careful: One size does not fit all. Learn about partnership options and pitfalls.

Plus, you'll have the opportunity to network with other community cancer programs across the country via roundtable sessions and networking receptions, and visit more than 50 exhibitors with the latest technologies and treatments.

Log on to www.accc-cancer.org for updates and to register online or call 301.984.9496.