

Oncology Social Worker— Access Navigator

by James C. Chingos, MD, CPE

A fashionable and successful member of the cancer care team has been the so-called “navigator.” This individual serves as a liaison to patients as they tackle the maze of tests, consultations, and ultimately treatment of their newly-diagnosed malignancy. This concept has typically been applied along disease lines, e.g., breast, thoracic, and genitourinary. The navigator provides important and logical value added for the patient, the family, and the cancer care program. Simply put, the navigator has exemplified the necessary role of facilitating “access” to care in an understandable, compassionate, and efficient way.

But this editorial is not about “navigators.” Rather I would like to draw attention to the necessary, logical, and essential role of the oncology social worker in facilitating patient access to an almost limitless number of issues, which arise as part of the cancer experience. Today, more than ever

before, the oncology social worker is an access coordinator to:

- Health insurance coverage questions and approvals
- Patient assistance and compassionate care programs
- Disability and family leave procedures
- Home care services
- Mental health and crisis intervention
- Support groups
- Hospice care.



Oncology social workers fill an extremely important gap in the overall care of the patient with cancer. They are an essential component

of a multidisciplinary cancer program. In brief, oncology social workers provide a service that others are unwilling or unable to perform. These individuals are truly navigators that facilitate access to the many moving targets that envelop the cancer patient. As program directors, administrators, and healthcare providers, we must acknowledge and support their role in the patient's care. 🗣️

ACCC Remembers a Friend

Tom Suzuki, art director of *Oncology Issues*, died on Sept. 3, 2006, from complications of leukemia after a short illness. From 1993 until September 2006, he gave this publication his creative talent, his leadership, and his technical expertise.

During his 47 years as a graphic designer, Tom's work appeared in Art Directors Club exhibits in San Diego, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington. His work also was exhibited by the American Institute of Graphic Arts and the Type Directors Club and appeared in *Print* magazine.

But perhaps Tom is best known for his innovative work in textbook design. In the 1970s, he is credited for transforming academic textbooks by introducing vibrant color and pictorial variety.



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