

## Developing Quality Survivorship Programs in Our Cancer Centers

by Richard B. Reiling, MD, FACS

ACCC plays a pivotal role in helping hospital- and practice-based cancer programs provide comprehensive, quality cancer care. For my term as ACCC President, I have chosen cancer survivorship—a key component of comprehensive care—as my focus issue.

The issue of cancer survivorship is not new to cancer programs. The Commission on Cancer has surveyed for survivorship programs in its accreditation process for many years. Unfortunately, my experience is that survivorship programs at many community cancer centers are quite limited. Some community cancer centers do not, as yet, fully understand the comprehensive nature of a cancer survivorship program or do not formally recognize such services. Why? Perhaps because the word “survivorship” is somewhat ambiguous. As practitioners, we all have our own concepts about how our patients will (or even should) lead the rest of their lives after cancer treatment.

In an effort to bring cancer survivorship issues to the attention of leaders in medicine, industry, and politics, the Institute of Medicine (IOM), in 2005, published a comprehensive look at survivorship in this country entitled *From Cancer Patient to Survivor: Lost in Transition*. For me, the take-home message was clear: as an industry we are devoted to quality cancer care; however, we are not doing a good job of navigating our patients through the “murky” waters of cancer survivorship.

For those patients who are not cured and who continue to receive active treatment right up to the time of demise, most community cancer centers provide services that we would consider “quality” care.

(And by “quality care” I mean the care that we would like to receive for ourselves and our family members.) But, for the rest of our patients—which includes the overwhelming majority of cancer survivors—we often offer little (if any) support. Currently, most of our nation’s 10 million cancer survivors are not

readily equipped or even comfortable enough to answer that same question—*how should I (or will I) lead the rest of my life after cancer treatment?* To even begin to address this issue, our patients need cancer survivorship support and resources at their community cancer centers.

Many organizations include survivorship as part of their mission. My goal is for ACCC to be a leader in educating and facilitating community cancer centers to develop and implement comprehensive survivorship programs that include the following elements identified on page three of the IOM’s report:

- Prevention of recurrent and new cancers;
- Surveillance for cancer spread;
- Intervention for consequences of cancer and its treatment; and
- Coordination between specialists and primary care.

In the coming months, ‘survivorship’ will figure prominently in ACCC’s two annual national meetings, as well as in *Oncology Issues*. ACCC’s Advocacy and Survivorship Committee is also working to provide models for cancer programs that want to start the process, as well as those wanting to provide more comprehensive survivorship services.

My message is simple: *Let’s all consider treating our patients as we would like to be treated ourselves.* ☐



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