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## Community Ties

by Christian Downs, JD, MHA

I have a three-year-old son and—his brother insists—a four-and-three-quarters-year-old son. As you can imagine, the holidays are always a fun time, and, of course, my boys are very interested in presents. My oldest is still too young to understand the concept of money, and that the gifts he and his brother receive actually “cost” something. So he spends a lot of time going through the toy store picking out everything that he wants and expects me to buy. (Many of you have suggested that boys never outgrow this phase—thanks for the tip.)

While it's true that the presents always get my boys excited, I've noticed that they really “light up” around friends and family. Spending time with their cousins in the backyard kicking a ball, riding a bike on grandpa's driveway, or even, heaven forbid, going with Mom and Dad for a special Christmas dinner—in jackets and ties, no less. So although my boys are too young to understand the concept of “community,” I believe that what they are responding to is being part of a community, specifically the feeling of being in a safe, caring environment, where we depend on each other for the real joys in life.

In this *Oncology Issues*, we focus on the issue of “community” and the special obligation(s) cancer providers have to their own communities. And when I talk about community, I'm really talking about people—friends, family members, business and professional associates, and the patients and families who come to you in an hour of great need.

In her article, certified oncology nurse Mary Ellen Loncto addresses an issue we sometimes overlook in

our communities: the psychosocial needs of cancer patients. For more than 30 years, the Cancer Support Team at The Whittingham Cancer Center has met those psychosocial needs—serving patients, family members, and staff throughout the cancer experience. Most important, it's a model for supportive care services that can be replicated in almost *any* community.

Authors Kerry Irish and Rita Molloy write about the “birth” of The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing at Central Maine Medical Center. Today, this program provides support, education, and health promotion for cancer patients and their families throughout Maine. A key component of the program: reaching out to the underserved in the community to improve access to care and cancer screening and prevention efforts.

Kelley Simpson and Patrick Board write about the benefits—and challenges—involved in joint ventures between hospitals and private practices. In their community, three private hematology/oncology practices and one hospital came together and developed an integrated model of care. As you will see from their experience, careful planning, common goals, and achievable outcomes can mean a successful joint venture for *any* community.

All of our contributors to this issue demonstrate how they serve their communities in many different and important ways. Their stories bring home the importance community makes in people's lives. It's a view I hope to share with my sons—that while presents are nice, the real “gift” is being part of a community. 🎁

