

Certainty in the Face of Change

by Al B. Benson III, MD, FACP

Physician-hospital integration is the focus of much heated discussion in the oncology community today. If you are seeing a trend toward market consolidation and hospital employment of physicians in your area, you are not alone. As ACCC's 2010 *Cancer Care Trends in Community Cancer Centers* survey revealed, consolidation of cancer programs within markets continues to accelerate. And consolidation among oncology practices is happening at an even faster rate. Almost half of survey respondents anticipate physician consolidation in their primary market area over the next one to two years.

Along with these trends comes a possible shift in the settings in which patients receive care from the practice to the hospital-based cancer program. ACCC's 2010 survey asked cancer programs: "Where do your physicians come from?" Fifty-six percent said that physicians were in private practice, 50 percent reported that physicians are paid employees of the hospital, and 12 percent have professional services agreements.

These trends raise important questions: Will private oncology practices remain a viable model for care delivery? If market consolidation continues, how might patient access to care be affected? Will physician-hospital integration lead to fewer sites of service? How will this affect care delivery to patients living in rural areas?

While benefits accrue from increased hospital-practice integration, such as greater access to clinical trials and added supportive care resources, many critical questions remain unanswered:

- How will clinical research be integrated?
- How will physician autonomy be impacted?
- How will staffing models be

altered? Will all staff members be retained? Will staff hierarchies and supervision requirements change?

- Will supportive care services be sustained? Enhanced?



As the leading education and advocacy organization for the cancer team, ACCC is closely monitoring these trends and developing resources and information to keep its membership abreast of these changes. ACCC's *Cancer Care Trends in Community Cancer Centers*, a joint project with Eli Lilly, is entering its third year. Survey results from years one and two are available on ACCC's website. ACCC's 27th National Oncology Economics Conference in September featured a well-attended session on physician-hospital integration that provided real-world examples and strategies to meet these challenges. *Oncology Issues* features articles on strategic planning, consolidation, and integration topics, including models of physician-hospital alignment successfully implemented in community cancer programs. ACCC's members-only listserve is an unparalleled resource for peer-to-peer discussion of daily challenges faced by cancer programs.

On January 14, 2011, ACCC's 6th Annual Hospital Summit offers an exceptional opportunity for oncology service line leaders to join together, gain perspective in the midst of change, and focus on strategies to strengthen their programs.

Underlying all of these efforts is ACCC's commitment to ensuring patient access to quality care. Whatever change lies in store for the delivery of care to cancer patients in the community, ACCC will continue to provide leadership, education, resources, and support for the more than 17,000 cancer care professionals comprising our membership. 📞

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