

A Time to Celebrate

BY VIRGINIA T. VAITONES, MSW, OSW-C



Greetings! As I write this column, I've just returned from the hugely successful ACCC 30th National Oncology Conference, held for the first time in Boston.

The sessions and education programs were innovative and thought-provoking. Here's one comment I overheard from a meeting attendee coming out of a session on rural chemotherapy, which was presented by 2013 Innovator Award Winner Avera McKennan Hospital and University Health Center, Avera Cancer Institute.

"I just implemented new competencies for my nurses, and I was questioning myself. After hearing this speaker, I knew I'd done the right thing!"

I hope that each attendee came away from ACCC's meeting with at least one such take-away message.

Once again I would like to thank everyone who attended the 30th National Oncology Conference. And for those of you not able to attend, I urge you to join us at ACCC's Annual Meeting, March 31-April 2, 2014, in Arlington, Va., as we celebrate the Association's 40th Anniversary. In fact, our first "celebration" arrived with this edition of *Oncology Issues: ACCC's 2014 Wall Calendar*—believe it or not, a first for the Association!


Along with marking ACCC's 40 years of service, the calendar also helps to spread my presidential theme—saluting the contributions of all members of the multidisciplinary cancer care team. I hope you will share this calendar with your colleagues and patients and display it proudly in your programs and offices so that we can celebrate together all year long. A special thanks to the ACCC member programs that shared images of their staff. As always, it takes a village at ACCC, and we would not be half as successful without the support and participation of our members.

But before we can hang this beautiful and useful calendar—pre-populated with dates and information of interest to the oncology community—we must first make it through the very hectic holiday season ahead.

Hopefully, we can look forward to many happy family gatherings and celebrations—for ourselves, our colleagues, and our patients. However, the difficult reality is that, for some of our patients and their families, this may be the last holiday they are all able to spend together. This knowledge, along with the added stressors of the holiday season, can be very challenging for these patients and families. While, as cancer care providers we do everything we can to help alleviate this stress, much of this responsibility rests on the shoulders of our psychosocial support services. So I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank all of the oncology social workers, child-life specialists, chaplains, psychologists, and other mental health professionals who remain vigilant and on the frontline, providing vital services to our patients and their caregivers during these sometimes tumultuous times.

As an oncology social worker, I understand that the holidays can also be somewhat stressful for our staff as well. My advice? First, adjust your expectations and give yourself permission to say "No" to activities or tasks that may overwhelm you physically and emotionally. Remember our patients rely on us for care, but we must first take care of ourselves.

Second, consider establishing some new traditions to reduce stressors, such as using technology to bring you closer to family and friends when traveling is too stressful.

Finally, enjoy the support of your multidisciplinary team colleagues. Leveraging the unique skills and strengths of each team member allow us to more fully appreciate time spent together in the workplace and at home during this holiday season and into the New Year. 

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