



Association of Community Cancer Centers

ONCOLOGY ISSUES

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FROM THE EDITOR

Improving the Care Experience—It's Complicated

BY CHRISTIAN DOWNS, JD, MHA



As another edition of *Oncology Issues* rolls off the presses, I am struck by how the feature articles in this issue reflect the nuances of what “improving the care experience” means for our

patients and their families, our cancer program staff members, and the wider oncology community.

For patients, improving the care experience must include addressing the emotional burdens that accompany cancer, author Marlena Ryba asserts in “A Cognitive Approach to Cancer Treatment.” Her article describes research on cognitive behavioral therapy interventions that have helped patients with the psychological impact of living with cancer and reaffirms the important role such interventions can play in patient-centered care, supporting patients in developing the tools and the confidence to regain control of their lives—whether or not treatment is able to control their disease.

In “Normalizing Feelings of Grief & Loss in Oncology Nurses” authors Jennifer Collins and Sandra Tan explore how Sarah Cannon Cancer Institute at Johnston-Willis Hospital is addressing the emotional and spiritual impact of patient death through the bi-annual Service of Remembrance that offers both nursing staff and families the opportunity to reconnect and honor the lives of cancer patients. Further, to help oncology nurses “step out of their caregiver role,” this ACCC member program developed a Reflection Service, exclusively to support oncology nurses.

From Stony Brook Cancer Center, Linda Bily describes “An Evening of Memories,” a low-cost program that brings staff and families together to celebrate those who have passed, cementing the bond between staff and families and helping to create closure for all involved.

Another perspective in improving the care experience is shared by the team at St. Joseph

Hospital—The Center for Cancer Prevention and Treatment in “A Model for Tissue Banking in the Community Setting.” The authors show how this community biospecimen repository program has informed and engaged patients and providers on the importance of donating specimens to support internal and external research projects.

Finally, we can all agree that addressing “financial toxicity” is essential to improving the care experience. The economic burden of cancer continues to be a pressing issue for patients, providers, and policy makers. The financial devastation accumulates from many sources, including patient out-of-pocket costs, unreimbursed expenses to providers, and stress on payers, such as Medicare and Medicaid. These problems are particularly acute for the many ACCC member programs that treat uninsured and underinsured patient populations. To proactively address this unwanted side effect of cancer, early intervention, care coordination, and proper planning are critical. In this issue, we share practical, actionable takeaways from the ACCC Financial Advocacy Network (FAN) Learning Labs.

For more practical, replicable strategies for improving the care experience, join us at the ACCC 34th National Oncology Conference, Oct. 18-20, in Nashville, Tenn. From sessions on improving the patient experience from chemotherapy to registration to a psycho-oncology program that saw a 256% increase in referrals for crisis intervention and counseling, the conference agenda brings together the knowledge, experience, and innovations of your peers. I hope you'll join ACCC member programs from across the country to network and expand your perspective.