

Oncology Issues

The Journal of the Association of Community Cancer Centers

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SEVEN MINUTES ON THE AIR



"All that is necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing."—Edmund Burke

It's 8:00 a.m. in the morning and in 10 minutes I'll be sitting across from Jane Pauley trying to tell two million Americans about our complex, confusing problem with reimbursement for cancer therapies. How do you simplify the issue? When is my stomach going to settle down?

In the midst of such thoughts, former boxing champion, Jose Torres, returns to the NBC green room and asks, "So, how did I look? I have no idea what I said, but how did I look?" A minute later he is shaking the hand of an NBC page and explaining why he quit his job as a boxing commissioner. "I didn't want to die a bureaucrat," he said. Now there's a thought!

In this issue of Oncology Issues, we talk about going public. It is time consuming. It is stressful. But if we don't do it, the insurance companies are going to win by default. This means we have to make our case forcefully to the public, to the legislatures, and to employer groups. Otherwise, the quote by Edmond Burke will apply.

Don't get me wrong. Going public is not easy, and it can disrupt your life. For instance, NBC called three weeks before the show and asked if I could simplify the issues presented in an article I wrote for the Wall Street Journal. They asked who should be interviewed and who I should debate. After dozens of phone calls, FAX transmissions, and date delays, suddenly my wife and I are flying to New York for seven short minutes of air time. At the same time, we're working with USA Today staff to prepare the article that was published on page one the same day as the Today Show broadcast.

Did we score a knock-out punch? Probably not, but, as Jane Pauley put it, "we're starting to get the issue on the agenda." We are increasing public awareness and making the insurance companies think twice. Since the broadcast, ACCC headquarters has received an array of calls from concerned Congressmen, patients, and providers.

In our local communities and states, you have a couple of choices: 1) you can roll over, or 2) you can dig in and fight. It is probably pretty obvious where my sympathies lie. However, the Boy Scouts are right; it is important to be prepared! When you start to work in your legislature or with the press, you have to be prepared to go up against professionals in their areas of expertise. One of ACCC's jobs is to help you. When you're ready to go public, give us a call.

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