



ACCC's Patient Advocacy Retreat

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ACCC's Patient Advocacy Retreat

On January 29, 1998, the Association of Community Cancer Centers hosted *Partnerships in Patient Advocacy*, a one-day retreat in which patient advocates and leaders from prominent oncology-related organizations and institutions convened to coordinate collaborative patient advocacy efforts. Participants included representatives from the American Cancer Society, the Association of Oncology Social Work, Cancer Care, Inc., the National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations, the National Cancer Institute, the Oncology Nursing Society, and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

Discussion focused on the Health Care Financing Administration's proposed regulations to implement the 1993 amendments to the Stark law (also known as Stark II) and their anticipated effect on patient access to chemotherapy administered in physicians' offices. (For more information, see "ACCC's Oncology Presidents' Retreat" on page 20.)

Access to supportive care drugs and other off-label indications is also a growing concern. ACCC Executive Director Lee E. Mortenson, D.P.A., reported several instances in which local Medicare medical directors are setting policy that discourages the use of supportive care drugs, such as GCSF and Procrit, as well as other compendia-accepted indications for off-label drug use. These policies conflict with the very federal and state laws enacted to ensure patient access to and physician reimbursement of these drugs, Mortenson argued, and reflect a disturbing trend of reducing the cost of cancer care at the patient's expense.

"The National Cancer Act was signed by President Nixon in 1971 with the intent of disseminating cancer care to communities where

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patients can get easy access to care," Mortenson stated. Patients, however, will be denied access to these therapies if their oncologists cannot afford to pay for them.

In other discussions, Mortenson announced that the Association and its Ad Hoc Committee for Advocacy are working with patient advocacy groups to evaluate the business community's understanding of the cancer benefits their insurers provide to their employees. The ACCC Board of Trustees has authorized the development of three pilot meetings with large businesses and third-party administrators to discuss criteria for evaluation of competitive insurer plans. The goal is to make employers aware of the complexity of oncology care and encourage them to adopt ACCC criteria for evaluating cancer care in their health plans.

ACCC is committed to advocacy on behalf of cancer patients, their families, and the community. In 1995 the Board of Trustees established a special Presidential Grant to



Among those in attendance at ACCC's recent "Partnerships in Patient Advocacy" retreat were Claudette Varricchio, D.S.N. (at right), program director at the National Cancer Institute's Office of Cancer Survivorship, and Marie M. Lauria, M.S.W., C.C.S.W., president-elect, Association of Oncology Social Work.

fund the initial meeting. Ortho Biotech Inc., was the sponsor of this year's Patient Advocacy Retreat. ■