



Who Sets the Standard?

Susan Brown-Wagner

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by Susan Brown-Wagner, R.N., M.S.N., A.O.C.N.

Webster's dictionary defines a standard as "an accepted measure of comparison for quantitative or qualitative value." Standards for cancer programs have been used to provide direction for determining the quality of cancer care provided. The Association of Community Cancer Centers has developed *Standards for Cancer Programs* to assist those cancer programs developing and/or maintaining a comprehensive, interdisciplinary program that meets the needs of cancer patients and their families. These standards were first published in 1988, revised in 1993 and 1997, and are currently undergoing yet another revision.

As chairperson of the ACCC Standards Committee, I recently had the opportunity to participate in a discussion regarding the usefulness and necessity of these standards in light of the fact that a strong resemblance exists between our standards and those set forth by the American College of Surgeons. The questions raised about the two sets of program standards were so thought-provoking, I went in search of answers.

The ACCC standards were

Susan Brown-Wagner, R.N., M.S.N., A.O.C.N., is director of patient services for the oncology service line at Scottsdale Healthcare – Osborn in Scottsdale, Ariz.

developed to reflect optimal components for a cancer program and continue to provide tremendous guidance to program administra-

defines what that supportive service should be.

Without the publication of ACCC's *Standards for Cancer Programs*, it is possible that other standards would not readily change. The American College of Surgeons' Committee on Approvals acknowledged in its publication of cancer program standards that ACCC standards "helped shape the new direction of the Approvals Program." As ACCC President Margaret Riley so eloquently stated, "ACCC and its standards are the guardians of cancer reality—we have to set the standard."

There is also a very practical reason for continuing to provide the oncology community with more than one set of standards. ACCC's *Standards for Cancer Programs* fulfills a need of many of our member institutions which, for various reasons, have chosen to forego ACoS accreditation or reaccreditation. The standards provide them with the guidance and direction to develop and maintain high quality cancer programs.

ACCC's cancer program standards, like its strategic plan, are intended as works in progress, with the ability to evolve and reflect changes in our health care system and our knowledge base. As cancer programs grow and mature, so must our standards if we are to encourage programs to continually strive for the optimal and not settle for the minimal. ■

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tors undergoing the strategic planning process. In many instances, ACCC standards take the typical standard a step further than merely reflecting a minimal requirement for purposes of accreditation. For example, instead of simply requiring access to support services, the ACCC standard