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## CNCCG: A Growing Leader in the Clinical Trials System

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## CNCCG: A Growing Leader in The Clinical Trials System

by Robert L. Comis, M.D.

In just two years since the formation of the Coalition of National Cancer Cooperative Groups, Inc. (CNCCG), the coalition has become a major player in the national clinical trials system. CNCCG's activities focus on four key areas: patient, payer and government relations; health and economic outcomes; clinical trials and site management; and international relations.

The coalition was established in November 1997 to support the cooperative group system in areas where common issues and initiatives exist. Its mission is to ensure the continued opportunity for patients to participate in clinical trials.

The founding members of the coalition include the foundations associated with seven of the National Cancer Institute's cooperative groups, including: the American College of Surgical Oncologists Group (ACoSOG); the Cancer and Leukemia Group B (CALGB), the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group (ECOG), the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP), the North Central Cancer Treatment Group (NCCTG), the Pediatric Oncology Group (POG), and the Radiation Therapy Oncology Group (RTOG).

The coalition's payer relations program recorded a banner year in 1998. In November, the coalition and the national managed care company, United HealthCare Group, signed a landmark agreement in

which United HealthCare agreed to pay the costs for patient care associated with multi-institutional trials conducted by the coalition or one or more of its cooperative group members. The agreement also helped pave the way for the coalition to take this program to other major health care insurers and managed care companies.

Subsequently, Aetna/U.S. Healthcare has worked with the coalition in developing a similar program to cover patient care costs for clinical trial patients. In addition, the coalition is partnering with the New Jersey Association of Health Plans and the New Jersey Commission on Cancer Research to create a statewide clinical trials coverage program. As part of this program, the coalition assists the case managers and health plans to identify those trials and institutions eligible for coverage in the program. A comprehensive database has been developed to support these programs.

In summer 1999, the coalition formed its first Patient Advisory Board, with patient advocates representing several of the cooperative groups as well as varying cancer institutes. Additionally, the coalition has been working closely with other cancer research organizations, patient advocacy groups, and the National Cancer Institute to open a national dialogue on the issues with managed care and clinical trials in a program called the Summit on Clinical Trials Series. To date, the "Summits" have been very successful and are already shaping a strategic direction that will be a win-win situation for all involved in the clinical trials process.

The clinical trials and site management unit of the coalition is a wholly owned subsidiary called Alpha Oncology. The subsidiary contracts directly with industry to conduct trials using the expertise of

the coalition's cooperative group members as well as its institutional members. The benefit to the patients is a broader menu of clinical trials; to the membership, a higher case reimbursement rate than typical cooperative group studies; and to the industry partners, the expertise of leading cancer experts in a quality assurance system. The coalition is currently negotiating with several industry partners in this area.

Additionally, a medical education and communications firm called Omega Med, formed in April 1999, supports the educational goals of Alpha Oncology. In May, Omega Med launched two web sites to meet the needs of professional continuing medical education: ([www.alphaoncology.org](http://www.alphaoncology.org)) and patient education in oncology ([www.alphacancer.com](http://www.alphacancer.com)). The firm currently provides, twice a month, live broadcasts in each of the four largest disease areas and maintains an archive of past programs. More than 20 programs are available on demand in video and audio archive.

The coalition has also recently become an integral part of the revisions of the national clinical trials system in their role as a subcontractor to the Cancer Trials Support Unit (CTSU). This program provides unprecedented access for physicians and patients to NCI treatment trials. The NCI awarded the contract to Westat Corporation of Rockville, Md., and Westat, in turn, has subcontracted with the coalition and Oracle Corporation of Redwood City, Calif. The coalition will help the CTSU in credentialing of investigators, audits, and regulatory issues. Oracle will design the systems to support these efforts.

For more information about the coalition and its initiatives, visit the web site at [www.ca-coalition.org](http://www.ca-coalition.org), or call 215-893-6442. ■

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