



We Must Work Together... Now More than Ever

On the evening of Sept. 10, I spent about two hours on the telephone with Lee Mortenson, ACCC's executive director, discussing the many issues and developments surrounding chemotherapy reimbursement in the hospital outpatient department and the physician office. Lee and the ACCC staff have spent considerable time on Capitol Hill armed with data and information to explain reimbursement issues in cancer care to lawmakers. We were quite certain that lawmakers intended to decrease average wholesale price (AWP). The decrease could be in the form of changing what AWP means, or it could be further discounts to the current AWP. Lee and I discussed some possible scenarios and how ACCC could impact the solutions. Such changes to Medicare reimbursement are of vital concern to cancer care providers.

Lee and I also had a philosophical discussion about life and how sometimes work takes the life out of people. ACCC was having a retreat the next day. Lee explained to me how he really wanted to help his staff to be the best they could be, helping each employee to focus his or her special talents. We talked about how important it is to care for our people in corporate America across the country.

Little did we know that night that the events of the next morning, Sept. 11, 2001, would test our ability to care for each other. The days following the tragic events in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania saw a tremendous outpouring of volunteers, food, prayers, blood donors, supplies, and money. We, as a nation, saw real people doing real acts of kindness. We saw rescue workers risking their own lives for the lives of others. We saw the CEO of a large corporation looking for his "700 missing family members." We saw employees of large corporations working together to create new offices. We saw health care professionals working beyond exhaustion to assist those in need. We saw a

nation in mourning for all who lost their lives in these senseless acts of terrorism, and we saw a nation unite in ways I have never witnessed before.

As I reflect on these events, I hope that we will learn from them. We, as a cancer community, must continue to unite in our fight against this disease we call cancer.

Like many Americans, I recently gave blood. As I was lying there, I saw a woman who was serving refreshments to those who had given blood. It was obvious to me that she was currently going through cancer treatment. I watched her visit with the blood donors and provide them with nourishment. I thought to myself, we must go on with our lives just as this woman has chosen to do. She and the many patients we serve need us.

Giving up would be easy. After all, the reimbursement issues seem too big for us to tackle, and our work is so difficult and emotionally draining. Finding good people to provide quality care is becoming an overwhelming task. Still, we cannot give up!

More than ever, physicians and hospitals need to work together to create a system of care that will benefit patients while allowing each entity to survive financially. The future of cancer care is in our hands, and we must continue our work to provide a system that allows cancer patients the best care possible. The world is counting on us to help heal those who have cancer and to find new treatments that will allow people with cancer to live productive lives. ❧

Teresa D. Smith

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