

The Importance of Being Part of ICLIO

BY TRACY VIRGILIO, RN, BSN, CCRC, OCN



Being an advocate, researcher, and an oncology nurse I felt that it was important to get involved in the Association of Community Cancer Center's (ACCC) Institute for Clinical Immunology (ICLIO) initiative. It is a great opportunity to network with other medical oncology providers, oncology nurses, and administrators to gain knowledge from them and hear the challenges they face in immuno-oncology. Partnering together, oncology providers can prepare for the future of immuno-oncology, working with legislators to make changes that will affect the overall future in the delivery of quality oncology care.

I have been working in this field for more than 16 years now and have seen much advancement in oncology treatment. The advent of immunotherapy is completely changing the scope of oncology. Cancer treatments are becoming more individualized for each patient. With the ever-evolving oncology landscape, I believe that the science behind immunotherapy will shape the future of how we treat cancer patients. Each patient is different—different genetically and different in how the individual tolerates and responds to chemotherapy. It is only a matter of time before we see cancer providers start to design care plans tailored to specific patients.

The Hope Offered by Clinical Trials

Over the years I have been very fortunate to be involved in the clinical trial aspect of oncology. While working on the clinical trial front, I provided patients with new treatments

and—most important—hope! Hope that they would get a second chance to see their children graduate, get married, and see their first grandchild being born. We offered therapies to patients who were given a three-month survival status and watched them break the mold by living for more than five years. All of these advancements were made possible by the early immuno-oncology therapies. Living past those three months was something these patients had not dreamed of at the time of diagnosis. And those trials paved the way for new ones.

I learned much from those early immuno-oncology clinical trials, including how to handle treatment-related side effects. These new therapies revealed new side effects that were not seen in early trials. New strategies were developed to manage patients based on the new information that was quickly coming out of the trials. This experience gave me the skills to:

- Educate staff on the management of these therapies
- Create new patient education materials
- Discuss and develop new pathways with the physician champion for following up with the patients in the office setting.

Next Steps

Some of the activities that we are currently doing as a practice at Associates in Hematology-Oncology in Upland, Pa., is staying abreast of the new therapies by continuing clinical trial enrollment and holding weekly nursing in-services, which include nurse educators and members of the pharmaceutical industry, as well as their reimbursement specialists.

As part of the nursing in-service, we review patient cases and discuss how we can improve patient care and manage treatment side effects in order to maximize the benefits of the immunotherapy and decrease the risks to the patient. We extend education to physicians and nurses outside of the medical oncology arena, who may come in contact with these patients. We discuss with the nurse educators what other practices are doing to manage these emerging side effects, and then learn and adapt these new techniques for our patients. We encourage patients and caregivers to ask questions so we can optimize their treatment through these open forums.

Based on discussions between nurses and the physician champion, our practice has developed and built chemotherapy templates to reflect lab studies and other critical time points indicated in the prescribing information that will affect patient outcomes. These small changes in practice and staying current on new findings, new complications, and new indications, help our staff provide the information and education our patients and their families need to make more informed decisions in their care.

Financial & Reimbursement Challenges


Recently I have become more involved with the financial and reimbursement aspect of oncology. The financial challenges new therapies create for patients make our job of providing immuno-oncology and chemotherapy medications ever more complex.

In our practice—as with many others—collaborative discussions between the financial counselor, billing department, and reimbursement specialists have become more common place. We leverage the expertise of these team members to help get therapies approved for patients and to ensure proper coding and billing practices. These discussions and meetings are quite useful as we often gain insight into challenges faced by other oncology practices, as well as payer roadblocks.

It is also important for us to know how to find funding for those patients who are in or will be in a financial crisis due to the

cost of these new therapies. Having adequate funding available is especially critical to the patient and caregiver during this stressful time.

As I was finishing up this article, Twitter was all a-buzz about the new advancements—and upcoming financial challenges of immuno-oncology treatments—being discussed at this year’s American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) meeting in June 2015. I have to say, Dr. Leonard Saltz summed up his talk with the perfect quote from Dr. Seuss, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” For this reason I am

looking forward to partnering with ACCC and ICLIO and welcome the opportunity to bring benefit—and hope—to the oncology community and, most importantly, our patients. 

Tracy Virgilio, RN, BSN, CCRC, OCN, has worked at Associates in Hematology-Oncology in Upland, Pa., for the last eight years as director of Patient Advocacy and Clinical Research. As part of her role, she acts as a clinical and financial liaison for the practice. Ms. Virgilio is also serving as an ICLIO Scholar.

Introducing ICLIO

A Community Centered on Transformative Care



An ACCC initiative, the Institute for Clinical Immuno-Oncology, or ICLIO, is designed to accelerate the adoption of immuno-oncology (I-O) by bringing together multidisciplinary leaders in the field to educate the cancer care community and facilitate successful clinical implementation.

As the premier source for I-O implementation resources, ICLIO will enable medical professionals to provide patients with cutting-edge cancer care by facilitating the integration of immunotherapy into clinical care, deciphering reimbursement and supporting patient access to emerging treatment options.

Our education tools will focus on 5 primary domains:

02 

Coverage & Reimbursement

04 

Patient Access & Advocacy

01 

Clinical Optimization

03 

Management Best Practices

05 

Training & Development

Visit us at accc-icl.io.org

to sign up for newsletters, updates, and register for the ICLIO 1st Annual National Conference.

Want to become involved?

Email Lorna Lucas, llucas@accc-cancer.org.



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