Five Questions About the NCCN Foundation

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The NCCN Foundation is the philanthropic affiliate of NCCN embracing the NCCN mission of improving the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of care provided to patients with cancer. The Chair of the Foundation Board of Directors is The Honorable Ellen O. Tauscher, former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control & International Security and Member of Congress. In this month's “The Last Word,” Marcie Reeder, MPH, executive director of the NCCN Foundation, answers questions about the Foundation, its relationship to NCCN, and how readers can get involved.

Learning About the NCCN Foundation

NCCN was begun in 1995, and the NCCN Foundation didn’t start until 2010. How did it come about, and why did NCCN decide to start a foundation after 15 years?

Ms. Reeder: NCCN wanted to build on its strong base and deep roots by creating a foundation that would enhance the mission of improving the quality and effectiveness of care for patients with cancer worldwide. The NCCN Foundation provided a platform to leverage NCCN's heritage of achievement to benefit patients with cancer and their caregivers and to fund the research of promising young investigators.

With the tagline Guiding Treatment, Changing Lives, the NCCN Foundation is a completely separate organization from NCCN, with its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit status and its own dedicated governing board. Through private philanthropy, the NCCN Foundation advances the mission of NCCN to improve the quality and effectiveness of care to patients with cancer. The NCCN Foundation was initially chaired by Sam Donaldson, ABC News veteran and a cancer survivor, and is currently chaired by The Honorable Ellen O. Tauscher, a cancer survivor; Senior Public Policy Advisor for Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell, & Berkowitz, PC; former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control & International Security; and Member of Congress. Members of the NCCN Foundation Board of Directors are active in various corporations, academic medical institutions, and advocacy groups. They are committed to gaining philanthropic support to provide resources and programs for patients with cancer and dollars to further advance cancer treatment.

The Foundation benefits from the collective expertise of the NCCN Member Institutions and the power of the collaborative efforts that have allowed NCCN to make such a large impact in oncology. NCCN Foundation initiatives are characterized by the same high standards and adherence to accurate, evidence-based, outcomes-driven programs and products that have been hallmarks of NCCN since its founding. The Foundation does not simply reiterate NCCN's previous achievements, however, but represents vital new growth, drawing strength from the diversity and knowledge of its leadership, its dedication to innovation and discovery, and its singular focus on bringing renewed hope to patients with cancer everywhere.

How does the NCCN Foundation differ from other organizations that seek to educate people about cancer and to help people with cancer lead better lives?

Ms. Reeder: A primary initiative that sets the NCCN Foundation apart from other organizations is the NCCN Guidelines for Patients program, which is the cornerstone...
of the NCCN Foundation. The NCCN Guidelines for Patients translate the contents of the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) into patient-friendly resources. The Guidelines for Patients give patients and caregivers access to the same expert panels, drawn from the NCCN Member Institutions, that their oncology health care providers rely on. No other source for patients provides step-by-step, stage-by-stage information on current treatment options that mirrors what most oncology professionals refer to when planning patient treatment.

We believe that the sheer volume of information on cancer available online makes the process of determining what is quality information and what is not cumbersome and time-consuming. This can hinder a patient’s ability to work with his or her physicians through the quick treatment decision process that may be needed in many cases. Having access to accurate, high-quality information allows patients and physicians to be “on the same page” and can boost communication and ease frustration for both.

What is the Pay It Forward campaign?

Ms. Reeder: The NCCN Guidelines for Patients are provided free-of-charge online at NCCN.org’s patient portal. The Pay It Forward campaign was created to build financial support for this vital resource and allows individuals, families, organizations, foundations, and businesses to contribute to their availability. Although the NCCN Foundation also seeks donations from companies and private foundations, we welcome gifts at all levels, and each gift, no matter how small, assists NCCN in providing more of these resources. We currently have 13 different NCCN Guidelines for Patients available: Breast Cancer, Caring for Adolescents and Young Adults, Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia, Colon Cancer, Esophageal Cancer, Lung Cancer Screening, Melanoma, Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma, Multiple Myeloma, Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer, Ovarian Cancer, Pancreatic Cancer, and Prostate Cancer. They can be accessed in a convenient flipbook style online at NCCN.org. The flipbook can be searched, downloaded, and printed.

The Pay It Forward program allows individuals to “pay forward” the support they receive. Pay It Forward donations are tax deductible and can be mailed to the NCCN Foundation at 275 Commerce Drive, Suite 300, Fort Washington, PA 19034 or made online by visiting NCCN.org. One hundred percent of each donation goes toward making the NCCN Guidelines for Patients available to others.

What are the Young Investigator Awards and why are they important?

Ms. Reeder: In this era of shrinking resources and competing priorities, providing new sources of support for young investigators has become essential. The United States’ ability to sustain robust scientific enterprises and remain a leader in developing effective treatments for cancer depends to a large extent on ensuring that scientists who are early in their careers have the resources necessary to research their innovative ideas—support that is often difficult to obtain through traditional funding mechanisms. The remarkable advances being made in understanding the fundamentals of cancer and the rapid pace at which knowledge is being translated into clinical practice make it even more important to identify and nurture the next generations of top scientists in this country.

Through the Young Investigator Awards, the NCCN Foundation makes career development grants available to physicians, scientists, and nurses at the 23 NCCN Member Institutions, all of which are top research centers and training grounds for the best and brightest medical and scientific talent. These young investigators, in turn, contribute to the body of knowledge that informs NCCN. These awards assist in and encourage the development of the next generation of cancer researchers.
With their success, the awardees support the NCCN mission to advance the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of care for people with cancer.

Since inception of the program in 2011, 13 young scientists have received NCCN Foundation Young Investigator Awards. In March 2013, abstracts highlighting the work of the inaugural recipients were presented at the NCCN General Poster Session during the NCCN 18th Annual Conference: Advancing the Standard of Cancer Care. The 2011 recipients’ research contributed to a number of critical areas in oncology, including physician attitudes and use of NCCN Guidelines, adherence to NCCN Guidelines related to diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, geriatric assessment in ovarian and colorectal cancers, and survivorship care planning and distress in leukemia and breast cancer survivors. The outcomes of this research, funded through the NCCN Foundation, illuminate the impact of the NCCN Guidelines in improving the lives of people with cancer.

Can physicians working outside NCCN Member Institutions get involved with the NCCN Foundation, and if so, how?

Ms. Reeder: Oncology professionals outside NCCN can get involved in several ways. First, health care professionals can refer patients to the NCCN Guidelines for Patients online and in print when available and discuss the Guidelines with them. In addition, by supporting the Pay It Forward campaign, they can help to keep this vital resource consistently updated and available to everyone.