Advancing the Standard of Cancer Care

Robert W. Carlson, MD

The NCCN hosted our 18th Annual Conference: Advancing the Standard of Cancer Care at The Westin Diplomat in Hollywood, Florida, March 13 through 17, 2013. We present these Highlights as a synopsis of the proceedings. These Highlights are now a special issue of JNCCN rather than a supplement or separate publication—given the value and importance of the information presented at the NCCN 18th Annual Conference.

The NCCN 18th Annual Conference was my first as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of NCCN, and it was especially gratifying to me to experience how much NCCN has grown and changed since I attended the very first NCCN conference in 1995. This year's conference sessions had a multidisciplinary focus and included discussions of the data behind the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) updates and discussions of special topics.

Updates of NCCN Guidelines on thyroid carcinoma, prostate cancer, melanoma, and others were presented along with 2 new NCCN Guidelines covering penile cancer and survivorship. The NCCN Guidelines on Survivorship are the newest entry into the NCCN Guidelines library, focus on selected areas of survivorship, and will expand to include additional issues of survivorship in the future. They are intended for health care professionals who work with survivors of adult-onset cancer in the posttreatment period, including those in specialty survivorship clinics and primary care settings.

Sam Donaldson, ABC News veteran and anchor, has opened the NCCN Annual Conference with a thought-provoking and powerful roundtable every year since 2006. Over the years, these roundtables have addressed topics from the role of the journalist in the war on cancer to caregiver issues and have included such notable personalities as Elizabeth Edwards, Scott Hamilton, former Pittsburgh Steelers Coach Bill Cowher, and Senator Connie Mack. This year's Highlights also include summaries of 2 of the now-seminal NCCN Roundtables.

This year's first roundtable, titled, "The Cost of Hope: A Candid Roundtable Discussion," followed a keynote address from Amanda Bennett, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Executive Editor, Bloomberg News, and author of The Cost of Hope: A Memoir, who spoke candidly about her late husband, Terence Foley, and his battle with kidney cancer.

Ms. Bennett was joined on the panel by Craig D. Turner, MD, Urologic Consultants, PC; J. Cameron Muir, MD, Executive Vice President, Quality & Access, Capital Caring and Assistant Professor of Oncology, Johns Hopkins Medicine; Ronald M. Bukowski, MD, Bukowski Consulting, LLC; and Keith Flaherty, MD, Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center. Most of the panelists were involved directly with Mr. Foley's care.

The second roundtable brought together an expert panel representing a diverse group of stakeholders involved in cancer care. Moderated by Clifford Goodman, PhD, of The Lewin Group, the discussion focused on the ever-evolving oncology landscape as it pertains to current disparities in the quality and value of cancer care, the implementation of big data, and the shift to more personalized care and advanced care planning.

And the NCCN Annual Conference remains just a part of NCCN’s efforts. This past year has been a very important one for NCCN. We recently completed...
and adopted a new strategic plan that focuses on goals and initiatives for the next 5 years. The strategic plan will enhance the usefulness of the NCCN Guidelines and related information products, including a new computer-based platform to aid in the development and modification of the Guidelines and facilitate their incorporation into a number of information technology forms and systems, many of which can be used at the point of care.

A new initiative with McKesson Specialty Health will develop value-based pathways for the treatment of common cancers. These pathways will be developed collaboratively and will be solidly based on the foundation of the NCCN Guidelines. During the next several years, you may also expect to see the NCCN Guidelines development process become even more transparent than it already is. The Guidelines will continue to migrate onto new information technology platforms to enhance their usefulness and, again, to bring them to the actual point of patient care.

Our international program will be organized so as to be more intentional and consistent and to bring improved quality of care globally through the dissemination of clinical care guidelines developed jointly by NCCN and regional experts around the world.

The library of NCCN Guidelines for Patients also continues to expand, in very large part due to the efforts of the NCCN Foundation and its supporters. The NCCN Guidelines for Patients translate the NCCN Guidelines for professionals in a clear, step-by-step manner that patients can use as the basis for making decisions and discussing options with their physicians. NCCN Guidelines for Patients now available on NCCN.org and NCCN.com include those for breast, colon, lung, ovarian, pancreatic, and prostate cancers; cancer in adolescents and young adults; chronic myelogenous leukemia; malignant pleural mesothelioma; melanoma; multiple myeloma; and lung cancer screening.

In 2012, NCCN undertook a national search for a new CEO, and for the first time, NCCN has a CEO who is a physician. As the new CEO of NCCN, I’ve been gratified to see the commitment of the Member Institutions, members of the Institutions, and NCCN staff to furthering our mission of improving the lives of patients with cancer. The expertise that these individuals and institutions bring to the table is truly remarkable.

NCCN is a special institution, and it is a privilege to join its leadership. We believe that JNCCN readers, whether you are from a member institution or not, also contribute to improving the quality of cancer care. We embrace this collaboration and partnership and look forward to working with you now and in the future. Your support of NCCN and our programs is invaluable, and I hope that you will continue to participate in the NCCN Annual Conference and other NCCN activities and programs. Please visit NCCN.org for more information and to access programs such as the NCCN Guidelines and to watch, and participate in, NCCN’s continuing evolution.