The NCCN 2019 Annual Conference: Improving the Quality, Effectiveness, and Efficiency of Cancer Care

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The NCCN 2019 Annual Conference: Improving the Quality, Effectiveness, and Efficiency of Cancer Care attracted nearly 1,500 registrants from across the United States and the globe, including oncologists (in both community and academic settings), oncology fellows, nurses, pharmacists, and other healthcare professionals involved in the care of patients with cancer. The breadth of topics presented at the conference is a reflection of the impact NCCN and the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) have on people with cancer and their families. This special issue of JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network presents these Highlights as a synopsis of the proceedings.

During the Conference, faculty from across the 28 leading academic cancer centers that comprise NCCN presented the latest best practices in the treatment of patients with cancer and explained NCCN Guidelines updates for various malignancies, including prostate, colon and rectal, kidney, breast, non–small cell lung, pancreatic, and bladder cancers, as well as chronic myeloid leukemia, sarcomas, and melanoma.

NCCN experts provided guidance on complicated issues across the continuum of cancer care, such as access to emerging treatments and how to prepare patients and their caregivers for end-of-life care. For example, Jeffrey Backer, MD, a cancer survivor and doctor at Emergency Physicians of Central Florida, shared his story of participating in a clinical trial for chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy after a second relapse of aggressive diffuse B-cell lymphoma. This keynote conversation on innovative therapies included nurse coordinator Alix Beaupierre, BSN, RN, OCN, and was moderated by Frederick L. Locke, MD, both from Moffitt Cancer Center, where Dr. Backer underwent treatment.

Also synthesized in this issue is a roundtable discussion that focused on how to increase access to innovative therapies and opportunities to surmount barriers to care. The NCCN Roundtable Discussion: Emerging Issues in Oncology—Ensuring Access to, and Delivery of, Innovative Therapies and Patient-Centered Care in Oncology was moderated by Clifford Goodman, PhD, Senior Vice President at The Lewin Group, and included Dr. Locke, along with Stefanie Joho, research/patient advocate and consultant; Jennifer Malin, MD, PhD, United Health Group; John W. Sweetenham, MD, Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah; and Lalan S. Wilfong, MD, Texas Oncology.

Another presentation focused on biomarker testing for immunotherapy. As noted by Jarushka Naidoo, MBBCch, from The Sidney Kimmel Cancer Comprehensive Center at Johns Hopkins, checkpoint inhibitor therapy has rapidly and drastically changed the treatment landscape in oncology. However, only a subset of patients show response to this type of treatment, underscoring the need for more reliable predictive biomarkers to guide the selection of patients for these therapies.

In other sessions, Aysegul A. Sahin, MD, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center; Timothy D. Gilligan, MD, Cleveland Clinic Taussig Cancer Institute; and Jimmy J. Caudell, MD, PhD, Moffitt Cancer Center, discussed changes in the 8th edition of the AJCC Staging Manual and challenges regarding...
these changes for staging of breast, testicular, and head and neck cancers, respectively.

The balance between the need to provide relief to the many patients with cancer and survivors who experience significant pain and the epidemic of opioid misuse and overdose deaths was addressed by Judith A. Paice, PhD, RN, Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University. “Simple solutions created a crisis. It will take complex solutions to solve it,” Dr. Paice said. “We need better education and access to addiction specialists. Our electronic records systems need to make it easy to do the right thing. And we can’t ignore the social determinants that drive drug use. But there is a silver lining; people are starting to recognize that the pendulum may have swung too far in the direction of opioid restriction, leaving many to suffer in severe pain. We need new ways to address the opioid crisis without causing unnecessary suffering for people with chronic or cancer-related pain.”

**Additional On-Site Activities**

Other programs held on site included the 2019 Nursing Program: Advancing Oncology Nursing, the NCCN Oncology Fellows Program: New Horizons in Quality Cancer Care, and various lunch and dinner symposia.

The NCCN Conference offers a tremendous forum for the many different voices in cancer care to break out of their siloes and share perspectives with others. With many different groups working to improve the lives of people with cancer, the NCCN Annual Conference provides the opportunity not just for expert clinicians to share the latest research in their specialties, but also for everyone hear from other stakeholders about how we can all work together to improve cancer care in the future. Additionally, eligible conference-goers were able to earn up to 17.75 credits for continuing education during the event.

During the NCCN General Poster Session, researchers presented more than 100 posters across 2 days, including studies focused on preclinical and translational science, clinical oncology, epidemiology/risks, correlative assays/genetics, best practices in implementation and use of clinical practice guidelines, quality improvement, outcomes and health services research, and bioinformatics/information technology sciences. Abstracts from select posters can be found in this issue, and all abstracts are available at JNCCN.org.

**NCCN Beyond the Conference**

Ultimately, people with cancer and their caregivers are the reason we are all here. Not only are we working hard to keep up with rapidly expanding diagnoses and therapeutic options, we are also working to define and advance high-quality, high-value, patient-centered cancer care globally, and that effort continues all year. The NCCN Annual Conference is only one facet of the wide-ranging work that NCCN does as we strive to improve and facilitate quality, effective, efficient, and accessible cancer care so patients can live better lives. Upcoming events include a policy summit on “The State of Cancer Care in America: The Impact of State Policy on Access to High-Quality Cancer Care,” in Washington, DC, on June 27, 2019, and the NCCN Annual Congress: Hematologic Malignancies in San Francisco, September 27 and 28. We also hope you will join us for the NCCN 2020 Annual Conference, March 20–22, 2020, at the Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando, Florida, which will include a look back on NCCN’s 25-year history. In the meantime, 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.