The NCCN 2021 Virtual Annual Conference

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Despite a year-long pandemic that made both research and patient care more challenging, NCCN's panels of experts from leading academic cancer centers continued to develop updates to the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) that helped oncology professionals worldwide maintain service to patients with best practices under evolving circumstances. The NCCN 2021 Virtual Annual Conference, held March 18–20, 2021, provided the opportunity for more than 1,300 attendees from across the United States and more than 40 countries to meet online and learn about updates to the NCCN Guidelines and new research in the field. Sessions explored supportive care and ways to help survivors return to work, updates on diagnostic testing, and the most contemporary treatments for multiple malignancies, including breast cancer, non-small cell lung cancer, gynecologic cancers, and head and neck cancers. This special issue of *JNCCN* presents these Highlights as a synopsis of the virtual proceedings.

The webinars synopsized here provide essential new information on how to achieve the best outcomes for patients, and they also provide a deeper understanding of the strong evidence that supports recommendations found in the NCCN Guidelines. Leading the conversation at the conference were 3 keynotes discussing new recommendations to advance racial equity, ways to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer care, and ongoing strategies for preventing and controlling human papillomavirus (HPV)-associated cancers.

Ongoing with the pandemic, 2020 was a year of reckoning with the United States' history of racial inequity, on which NCCN and the greater healthcare community have been called with renewed urgency to develop ways to make quality cancer care more accessible and equitable. At the conference, representatives from the Elevating Cancer Equity Working Group—convened by NCCN along with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) and the National Minority Quality Forum (NMQF)—discussed detailed recommendations for reducing racial disparities in cancer care. People of color—especially Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people—often have higher cancer rates and yet are medically underserved, experiencing later diagnosis and worse outcomes. These disparities result from systemic inequality and bias in access and care delivery, and oncology professionals have a responsibility to respond, and help ensure their patients have access to guideline-adherent cancer care.

Another keynote panel addressed the importance of vaccination, screening, public and professional education, and system/process improvement in preventing cancers common in people infected with HPV. This panel discussed the significant impact HPV vaccination can have on reducing cancer incidence in the United States, as well as globally; why many countries still have low vaccination rates; and how to counter misinformation about vaccines. Strategies to increase vaccination and otherwise control HPV are vital to cancer prevention.

The final keynote discussed ways that the COVID-19 pandemic forced oncology professionals to adapt to provide ongoing care for patients with cancer, especially those at high risk. The panelists reviewed the COVID-related difficulties cancer centers have faced, how they adapted, and the possibility of permanent shifts to incorporate more telemedicine.

In addition to synopses of these keynote sessions and other presentations, this Highlights issue also includes a selection of the abstracts from the NCCN General Poster Session, with studies focused on clinical oncology, preclinical oncology, epidemiology/risks, correlative/genetics, best practices in implementation and use of clinical practice guidelines, quality improvement, outcomes and health services

ROBERT W. CARLSON, MD

Robert W. Carlson, MD, joined NCCN as CEO in January 2013 following an esteemed history of leadership positions within the organization, including Representative to the NCCN Board of Directors, Chair of the Breast Cancer Guidelines Panel, and Member and Founding Chair of the Breast Cancer Risk Reduction Guidelines Panel. Prior to this appointment, he served as Professor of Medicine in the Division of Oncology and Stanford Medical Informatics at Stanford University Medical Center, as well as Medical Director of Inpatient Oncology and Hematology at Stanford Cancer Institute. Dr. Carlson is a graduate of Stanford University Medical School, and he completed his internship and junior residency in internal medicine at Barnes Hospital Group before returning to Stanford University to complete his senior residency. Dr. Carlson is board certified in Medical Oncology and Internal Medicine and is a member of several medical societies. He lectures extensively and has authored or co-authored more than 140 articles, abstracts, and book chapters. From 2001 through 2012, Dr. Carlson was selected by America's Top Doctors; from 1994 through 2011, he was selected by Best Doctors in America; in 2008, he was presented with the National Physician of the Year Award for Clinical Excellence by Castle Connolly Medical, Ltd.; and in 2010, Dr. Carlson was given the Founding Collaborator Award by the Breast Health Global Initiative (BHGI).

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research, and bioinformatics/information technology sciences. All accepted abstracts are available at JNCCN.org and at NCCN.org.

The NCCN 2021 Virtual Annual Conference also included varied other programs online. For example, the NCCN 2021 Virtual Nursing Program: Advancing Oncology Nursing included topics such as cultivating resilience, improving symptom management, and advancing survivorship, among others. The NCCN 2021 Virtual Oncology Fellows Program: New Horizons in Quality Cancer Care included sessions on telemedicine and mentorship, as well as multidisciplinary treatments of several malignancies.

The online conference platform allowed attendees to continue accessing all sessions until mid May 2021. After that, the sessions, including the nursing and fellows programs, were made available as recorded webcasts via the NCCN Continuing Education portal at education.nccn.org/ac2021.

We invite you to take part in the post-conference discussion on social media by using the hashtag #NCCN2021, or visit NCCN.org/news for updates. And stay tuned for more information on the 2022 NCCN Annual Conference, which will take place March 31–April 2, 2022. Look for more information at NCCN.org/conference.

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