

## Together Again!

**D**uring the darkest part of the COVID pandemic, a young cousin of mine, Siri Undlin, a songwriter, wrote a lovely piece for her group Humbird. It is called, “On the Day We Are Together Again” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSA4vF2qc3Q>), and it evoked all the simple things we missed about being with family and friends. In fact, during a brief time in 2021, when my family were all initially vaccinated and no one was getting infected, we managed to squeeze in a family reunion. We sang this song for grace before dinner, all holding hands in a circle. There wasn’t a dry eye in the room!

Of course, since then a series of more infectious variants have challenged our attempts to gather personally and professionally. When it became clear that the annual ASCO meeting would be held with all the usual bells and whistles, I was one of the first to sign up! After all, they required vaccination and recommended daily antigen testing at the meeting, and that seemed safe to me.

The meeting was everything I had hoped for. First, I got to see my professional family in 3 dimensions, and it was amazing. We talked, we laughed, we shared meals. After months of seeing each other only virtually, we were hungry for real human interaction. Second, I was energized by the whole scene. I was like a kid at the county fair. I attended every session I could fit in. I simply couldn’t get enough.

One experience really stood out for me. First, I had lunch with 2 colleagues from Copenhagen whom I had missed very much. Then we attended the plenary session together. We listened to an amazing presentation of the Destiny-Breast04 trial<sup>1</sup> by Shanu Modi, MD, which established a new standard of care for patients with HER2-low metastatic breast cancer. In this study, trastuzumab deruxtecan conferred a 50% reduction in the risk of disease progression or death in a patient population that formerly was offered only palliative single-agent chemotherapy.<sup>1</sup> It was such a dramatic result that thousands of oncology professionals gave a spontaneous standing ovation! Everett Vokes, MD, President of ASCO and the Plenary Session Chair, stood also, clapping and saying, “Welcome back to live meetings!” I knew that would never have been as powerful in a virtual setting.

My husband attended this meeting also. He is an oral surgeon, not an oncologist, but he loves the social events, and over the years he has made many friends through our connections with ASCO. A few days after returning home, he developed muscle aches and began to cough. You guessed it. COVID! I tested also and was positive but asymptomatic. We followed the standard rules and laid low for a while, emerging when we cleared antigen testing.

You might think this would have caused me to regret the choice we made to go, but I don’t. I was fortunate not to get ill, and maybe that would have made a difference in my thinking. But as it is, I would go again, even knowing this would happen, because the event was such a positive experience.

Now, of course, with an additional booster—albeit natural—I feel invincible. So I am happy that NCCN has been having (some) in-person and hybrid meetings. My first in-person meeting was in August. It was great to be “together again.”

### Reference

1. Modi S, Jacot W, Yamashita T, et al. Trastuzumab deruxtecan in previously treated HER2-low advanced breast cancer. *N Engl J Med* 2022;387:9–20.



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Margaret Tempero, MD, is a Professor of Medicine and Director of the UCSF Pancreas Center and editor-in-chief of *JNCCN*. Her research career has focused on pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma, especially in the area of investigational therapeutics. Dr. Tempero has served on the ASCO Board of Directors and as ASCO President. She currently serves on the ASCO Conquer Cancer Foundation Board. She codirected the AACR/ASCO Methods in Clinical Cancer Research and taught this course and similar courses in Europe and Australia. She was founding Chair of the NCI Clinical Oncology Study Section and served as a member and Chair of the NCI Board of Scientific Counselors Subcommittee A. She is a member of the Scientific Steering Committee and Chair of the Clinical and Translational Study Section for the Cancer Prevention & Research Institute of Texas. She is or has been on the Scientific Advisory Boards of the Lustgarten Foundation, the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, the V Foundation, The Alberta Canada Cancer Board, and the EORTC. She served as a member of the Oncology Drug Advisory Committee for the FDA. She has served as Deputy Director and Interim Director for the UNMC Eppley Cancer Center. She is Chief Emeritus of the Division of Medical Oncology at UCSF. She served as the founding Deputy Director and was later Director of Research Programs at the UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center.

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