The NCCN 2023 Annual Conference

Robert W. Carlson, MD, and Wui-Jin Koh, MD

The NCCN 2023 Annual Conference was held in Orlando from March 31 through April 2, with both in-person and virtual attendance opportunities. The conference had a particular focus on human connection, underscored by more than 2,000 registrants from across the continuum of cancer care, including more than 1,200 who returned in-person. The program highlighted the importance of ensuring cancer care incorporates latest science and standards while also rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach.

The conference included more than 30 educational presentations, with multiple sessions dedicated to finding solutions for challenges such as systemic bias, social determinants of health, and staffing issues that can reduce people’s access to the best possible cancer care. Additionally, experts from the NCCN Guidelines Panels had discussed their recommendations and updates with a multidisciplinary healthcare provider audience. This special issue of JNCCN presents these conference Highlights, in print and online at JNCCN.org (including a number of online-only summaries), as a synopsis of the proceedings.

A focus of the conference was the importance of addressing difficult and sometimes uncomfortable issues, with many sessions stressing the imperative of asking tough questions. One question that came up again and again was: “Who are we missing?” One aspect of this was examined during a plenary session on “Best Practices for Addressing the Health Needs of the LGBTQ+ Community in Oncology Care,” in which faculty highlighted the lack of data on sexual orientation and gender identity in people with cancer. Panel participants also discussed how experiences with bias and misunderstanding can make people reluctant to access and engage with necessary healthcare and suggested approaches that can improve inclusion and equity in oncology.

In another plenary session focused on sleep disorders, fatigue, and cognitive function in cancer survivors (synopsis available at JNCCN.org) speakers again noted the need for more data. The panelists explained that there is good evidence that physical activity can help with cancer-related fatigue. But when it comes to other interventions that may mitigate sleep disorders and cognitive impairment, more research is needed. Panelists also cautioned that these are individualized experiences that require personalized engagement between the patient and provider.

Reducing staff burnout and turnover is another area where asking the right questions can go a long way. In a plenary session on “Health System Recruitment and Retention Strategies” (synopsis available on JNCCN.org), speakers pointed out how the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath have caused many in healthcare to reassess their lives and priorities. The loss of staff has accelerated an already-looming workforce shortage in oncology. Panel participants emphasized that the best ways to retain high-value employees are to listen to them, support their needs, and keep them on career paths that are both challenging and fulfilling.

The NCCN 2023 Annual Conference featured multiple discussions about the latest research and clinical trial data, and how they underpin up-to-date clinical practice recommendations. The sessions summarized in this issue provide essential information on how to achieve the best outcomes for patients and also provide a deeper understanding of the evidence that supports recommendations found in the NCCN Guidelines. The conference included sessions on topics such as updates in the management of immunotherapy-related toxicities, treatment of hepatobiliary cancers, benefits and challenges in lung cancer screening, and neoadjuvant approaches for stage II–III rectal cancer. Leading experts also presented the latest treatment recommendations for

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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 coauthored 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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more than a dozen additional types of cancer, including multiple myeloma, glioma, and breast, colorectal, lung, and prostate cancers.

Attendees were invited to “Continue the Conversation” in small group settings for informal discussions immediately following some of the sessions. For those attending in-person, there were also numerous opportunities for networking in the live Exhibit Hall and at a poolside reception.

The conference also included more than 100 abstract poster presentations featuring original research data in a variety of oncology-related categories (available at JNCCN.org). “Follow the Experts” guided tours delved deeper into dozens of poster abstracts showcasing cutting-edge research on cancer treatment and delivery. Selected posters, including those submitted by NCCN Foundation Young Investigator Awards recipients and an additional top 5 highest-scoring abstracts were showcased as oral presentations (also available in the print Highlights).

We look forward to having you join us for future live and virtual events. NCCN will return to the Marriott World Center in Orlando for the NCCN 2024 Annual Conference, April 5–7, 2024. Before then, there will be two NCCN Policy Summits and one NCCN Patient Advocacy Summit in Washington, DC, and the NCCN 2023 Annual Congress: Hematologic Malignancies in San Francisco, September 22–23, 2023. Visit NCCN.org for a full calendar of upcoming events.

WUI-JIN KOH, MD

Wui-Jin Koh, MD, is the Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer at NCCN. In this role, he helps oversee the flagship NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) program. In addition, he is responsible for medical leadership and oversight for NCCN’s continuing medical education program, and represents the organization at clinical and scientific meetings. Before joining NCCN, he served as Professor of Radiation Oncology at University of Washington and Medical Director for Radiation Oncology at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center/Seattle Cancer Care Alliance. Dr. Koh earned his medical degree at Loma Linda University School of Medicine and conducted post-graduate training at the University of Washington Medical Center. He is board-certified in radiation oncology. His research interests include combined chemoradiation strategies, cancer management guidelines development, and the role of imaging in radiotherapy and cancer care. He specializes in gynecologic tumors, lung cancer, ocular tumors, and sarcomas, as well as intraoperative radiotherapy, brachytherapy including radioactive implants, high-dose radiation and low-dose radiation implants. He also treats rectal, esophageal, stomach, pancreas, colon, and biliary tract cancers. Dr. Koh is well-published and involved in numerous professional societies, including the Society of Gynecologic Oncology, the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology, ASCO, the Gynecologic Oncology Group, the Western Association of Gynecologic Oncology, and the International Gynecologic Cancer Society.