



A Surgeon's Perspective

from ACCC's President

by Richard B. Reiling, MD, FACS

As a lifelong surgical oncologist and teacher, I have always been interested in and concerned about the delivery of cancer services in community hospitals. I went to medical school and received surgical training in Boston. After a stint in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War, I went into surgical private practice in Dayton, Ohio. At that time I also joined the department of surgery at the Wright State University School of Medicine [now the Boonshoft School of Medicine], and today I am still a clinical professor of surgery at that program.

I have served as medical director of the cancer program at Kettering Medical Center in Dayton, and also as vice president for cancer services at the combined Grant and Riverside Hospitals in Columbus. In 2003, I assumed my current position as medical director of the Presbyterian Cancer Center in Charlotte, N.C. Although I am no longer active as a surgeon, I have the opportunity to develop programs that I had only dreamed of in the past: a nurse navigator program; clinical trials that involve surgeons; and survivorship programs.

Focus on Survivorship

Both my wife and I are “survivors,” and we have both been concerned about survivorship issues for all cancer patients. In many instances, patients do not have access to survivorship programs. Where programs

exist, there are often gaps in access. We need to change that and offer the same services to all our patients. Lack of survivorship programs leaves the uninformed patient just that—uninformed—but also anxious and scared of the future. ACCC is in a unique position to offer support and advice to its member programs on many aspects of cancer care. It seems appropriate to focus on what makes a comprehensive survivorship program, and to encourage and facilitate adoption of such programs around the country. The theme of survivorship will be included in ACCC's upcoming October Oncology Economics Conference in Dallas, Tex.

Current Challenges

In 2007, oncology faces the ongoing challenge that we've confronted for many years: how can we provide comprehensive cancer care at a cost affordable to all our patients and not overwhelm the nation's healthcare system. As practitioners we need to be critically aware of our patients' needs; but at the same time, we must realize that we are part of the total healthcare system and its rapidly increasing costs. Cancer care is one of the most rapidly growing service lines as the population ages and is benefiting from improved cardiovascular health.

We must structure our care systems to appreciate the overall effect of healthcare financing. We need to look at outcomes and make informed decisions based on effective and safe results. At the same time, we need to look at and reduce wasteful and excessive system utilization.

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For many years, I've been the “token” surgeon on ACCC's Board. I believe that we need many more surgeons involved in the manage-

ment of their community cancer programs. Many administrators would argue that the key to a strong program is through their surgeons. Yet, as a specialty, surgeons have not stepped up to these leadership roles. The weekly or more frequent tumor conferences need surgical input as well as active presentations. These conferences should be more than “show and tell,” and should focus on individual patient care—put simply, a correlative clinic. The cancer committees, as mandated by the Commission on Cancer, need to become productive exercises in which quality and services are critically appraised and outcomes reviewed. In serving as ACCC President, I hope to attract more surgeons to the Association's activities and involvement in their community programs. ■

Richard B. Reiling, MD, FACS, is medical director of the Presbyterian Cancer Center in Charlotte, N.C. A Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, Dr. Reiling has been active within the organization. He was surveyor and member of the College's Commission on Cancer, a member of the Commission's Standards Subcommittee, chair of the Development Committee, and chair of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organization's Professional and Technical Advisory Committee/Ambulatory Health Care. In 2004, Dr. Reiling was honored by the American College of Surgeons with its highest recognition, The Distinguished Service Award.