

Bringing the Moonshot Down to Earth

What the taskforce means for ACCC members

BY LEAH RALPH

On January 12, 2016, President Obama used his State of the Union address to announce that Vice President Biden would be leading a national moonshot to end cancer as we know it. By the end of January, a Presidential Memorandum was in place establishing the Federal Cancer Moonshot Taskforce, which was charged with doubling the rate of progress in cancer research and treatment, making a decade worth of advances in five years. The Vice President has said “we’re not trying to make incremental change here—we’re trying to get to a quantum leap on the path to a cure.”

By early February, the Administration had made what they were calling an initial down payment on the Moonshot Initiative: \$1 billion through FY2017 for cancer-related research activities at the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration.

The Moonshot framed their work by laying out several areas where there seems to be consensus—and opportunity for advances—in the cancer community:¹

- 1. We’re at an inflection point, and the science is ready.** We need to break through barriers—whether it be research, funding, or information sharing—to speed progress and increase access.
- 2. We have the potential to take advantage of big data and supercomputing with greater data sharing.** Allow researchers, scientists, and physicians access to the wealth of information that cancer centers keep, including genetic history, medical records, and tissue banks. Ensure this information is interoperable and

accessible to speed up research advances and improve patient care.


- 3. We need to increase access to game-changing treatments.** Only five percent of cancer patients participate in a clinical trial. Expand access to these trials and empower patients by providing them with their data.

Since January, we’ve seen a number of partnerships and commitments emerge—and the Moonshot seems to be harnessing private sector commitments and increased federal funding to develop innovative solutions to breaking down barriers to both data and patient access.

I know what you’re thinking: this all sounds very Washington D.C. The goals are admirable, but how do we get there? As Dr. Jennie Crews said in her “President’s Message,” the Vice President has been clear that this is not only something everyone can be a part of, but the onus is “on all of us” to help carry this work forward. The Moonshot website (whitehouse.gov/cancermoonshot) provides specific, tangible opportunities to be part of this initiative, including sharing your personal story with cancer or collaborating with others on novel ways to fund and advance cancer research; strengthening the drug development process; developing a robust and secure IT infrastructure for sharing research results and clinical health information; or formulating novel strategies for engaging the public in prevention and awareness efforts.

ACCC members also attended many of the Cancer Moonshot summits that took place across the country in late June, discussing a

variety of issues, including the challenges of getting medical advances to the community setting. Since those meetings, Dr. Crews and I have worked closely with the Moonshot staff to facilitate conversations with our members to ensure their recommendations to the Vice President—that will be made by the end of the year—truly reflect how cancer care is delivered in the community setting. During a virtual focus group with the Moonshot staff in late August, ACCC members were asked about access to clinical trials in the community setting; gaps in addressing survivorship; challenges in capturing patient treatment goals; the use of clinical navigators; and community cancer program participation in big data efforts and precision medicine.

In October, the Vice President’s staff will join us at the ACCC National Oncology Conference in St. Louis to share what they’ve learned from groups like ours and to get your feedback on draft recommendations around community oncology. Be sure to join us for this special session to learn more about what the Cancer Moonshot means for your cancer program, and what you—as the cancer care professionals on the frontlines—can share with this important initiative. 

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References

- Office of the Vice President. The Cancer Moonshot Task Force: Removing Bureaucratic Hurdles and Supporting Scientific Advances. Available online at: medium.com/cancer-moonshot. Last accessed Aug. 23, 2106.

