

Connection is the Key

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In May, for my first President's Message, I wrote that to drive oncology forward "We need every member and every discipline, leader, payer, industry partner, and innovator working together to provide the best care possible in a sustainable way." Today, that message is truer than ever.

Although we all hoped that in 2021 we would see COVID-19 in the rearview mirror—with widespread vaccination curbing the number of new cases and pre-pandemic equilibrium settling across the healthcare enterprise—that is not how the year unfolded. Instead, over much of the summer, communities in many areas of the country were once more deluged with COVID-19 cases, their hospitals and healthcare facilities strained—sometimes beyond capacity—and their healthcare workforce exhausted.

For many, the past months have taken a heavy toll. And yet, we continue to lift each other up. We do this when we connect with our colleagues and work teams, with our friends and families, and in our neighborhoods and communities. ACCC members do this by connecting through ACCCeXchange posts, webinars, podcasts, virtual meetings, and this journal—sharing experiences, policies, workflow solutions, and practical wisdom—all of which I am immensely grateful. Throughout the pandemic, we've come to a renewed appreciation for how deeply our connection to each other matters.

As the oncology community continues to move forward, we have the opportunity to build on and strengthen the many bonds developed as we connected to overcome pressing pandemic-driven challenges—bonds that united our community in the common goal of ensuring that patients with cancer had continued access to quality care. Over the course of 2020, the oncology community also


came together to acknowledge a profound need to focus on improving equity, diversity, and inclusion in cancer care—recognizing equity as inherent to quality cancer care. In this work, too, our connectedness is the key.

ACCC shares in this commitment. Through ACCC education and resources, cancer programs and practices can find many paths to engagement in action for equitable cancer care delivery. Last spring, ACCC and Harborside convened a group of leading oncology advanced practitioners, to gain their perspective on the advanced practitioners' role in equitable cancer care delivery. Learn about the conversation and the group's consensus on 10 action steps on page 14.

How can a large integrated health system serving a diverse population create a health equity-focused culture? Read about Sutter Health's Institute for Advancing Health Equity and the impetus behind creation of its Health Equity Index tool (page 37). In a companion interview, health equity thought leader Maria Hernandez, PhD, shares some practical wisdom for programs of any size and resource level in addressing health equity:

My suggestion is start by looking at what your patients are saying. What do they say about your services? What do they say about their care experience? Invite them to the table for that conversation. You get a wealth of information about how you're doing with those vulnerable populations when you ask them: What is it like getting care here? What have you encountered? Do you feel like you are welcome? Do you feel like your doctor understood you? Do you feel like you were heard? Those conversations are, I think, really critical to get started with whatever program or policy changes you may need to make.

In other words, Dr. Hernandez is advocating that we connect with our patients.

As we turn the corner toward 2022, for oncology to drive equity forward: We need every member and every discipline, patient, leader, payer, industry partner, and innovator working together to provide the most equitable care possible in a sustainable way. 

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