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A Call to Collaborate: Designing Smarter, Stronger Oncology Systems

BY UNA HOPKINS, DNP, MSN, BSN, FNP-BC, NE-BC, RN, FACCC



As a lifelong advocate for the power of interdisciplinary collaboration in cancer care, my 2025-2026 ACCC President's Theme of *Designing Oncology Care to Meet the Needs of a Growing*

Patient Population is more than just an idea—it is a call to action. We are facing unprecedented growth in the cancer patient population amid regulatory and legislative uncertainty and a rapid pace of technological and scientific innovation that, while impressive, can be challenging to keep up with.

The only way forward is together. When we learn from one another and lift each other up, we unlock the power to overcome the toughest challenges in oncology care. Together, we must harness the full potential of our oncology teams, build capacity at scale, and embrace technology not as a human replacement, but as a workforce multiplier that empowers all of us to do more—to reach further and to care better.

At the 42nd National Oncology Conference this past October, I was joined by 3 extraordinary leaders for my opening fireside chat. These individuals represent 3 diverse ACCC Member Programs who offered attendees more than just ideas—they gave real-world solutions that are in practice right now.

Karla Bowen, director of nursing operations at Orlando Health Cancer Institute, shared her program's electronic health record-based artificial intelligence (AI) template management tool, which has significantly improved infusion operations, increased capacity, and enhanced both patient and provider satisfaction. Previously, patient scheduling required navigating multiple screens to reference

addresses, treatment locations, and route mapping. This innovation has acted as a true workforce multiplier by centralizing key information onto a single screen and streamlining the scheduling process immensely. As a result, Orlando Health's 6 sites gained 100 hours of patient access without changing hours or staffing, and the time to appointment dropped from 7 days to just 24-48 hours.

Brian Lasonde, MPAS, PA-C, advanced practice clinician manager for Medical Specialties at Sutter Health – Palo Alto Medical Foundation, is leveraging AI to meet patients where they are through patient education videos. Using AI tools, his team can quickly generate consistent scripts and videos, ensuring that the same information is delivered the same way every time. The equity implications are equally astounding when we consider being able to present the same information to every patient, every time, in every language.

Charles Shelton, MD, radiation oncologist and medical director at Outer Banks Health, is using technology not just as a workforce multiplier, but also to bridge geographical and knowledge gaps between programs. As a rural hospital in a resource-challenged region, his team recognized the need to make cancer care an essential service and piloted a virtual conference in 2014 to connect with other cancer centers.

The road to equitable cancer care is long, uncertain, and riddled with institutional obstacles, yet I remain inspired and deeply hopeful for the future of oncology when I see the incredible work of ACCC members. We are proving that the future of oncology is not just about technology—it's about people. Let's continue to share our challenges, successes, and ideas with one another and lean on the ACCC community as a source of innovation, resilience, and compassion. **●**

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- ▶ Shaw at Home: An Oncology Specific and Community Based Palliative Care Program
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