

2024 ASCO[®] ANNUAL MEETING



ASCO 2024: Unveiling the “Aha” Moments in Cancer Care

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The Art and Science of Cancer Care: A Personal Journey at ASCO

The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) 2023-2024 theme, “The Art and Science of Cancer Care: From Comfort to Cure,” was a central focus throughout this year’s annual scientific meeting. This theme beautifully encapsulated the balance between innovative therapeutic breakthroughs and the profound human impact of cancer care. Celebrating my 15th year as an ASCO member and volunteer, I have had the privilege to serve on the Clinical Practice and Education committees, review for the Journal of Clinical Oncology Practice, and be an ASCO Ambassador and annual meeting faculty member. In my 10th annual meeting, I witnessed a testament to the integration of art and science in cancer care, with diverse voices from podiums, microphones, avatars, posters, and conversations, creating a rich and multifaceted learning environment.

Amplifying the Patient’s Voice: Ensuring True Representation and Engagement in Oncology

At this year’s ASCO Annual Meeting, the voice of the patient was more prominent than ever. I spent time with Matt Zachary, who is one of the longest serving members of the “cancer survivor” community and has been a compelling and consistent voice in the community. We both reflected on the significant representation of patients and the need to ensure their voices are not only heard but listened to. We discussed the depth and breadth of patient representation and emphasized the importance of creating greater engagement, not merely with the meeting itself but also with the education curriculum, to truly listen to their experiences and act on their concerns.

While many patient advocates were present in Chicago, we must remember there are others who couldn’t attend due to economic or health reasons. As an oncology community, we need to ensure that the voices of all patients are represented, especially those who are less fortunate. Metrics like overall survival, progression-free survival, and event-free survival are important, but they aren’t the only things that matter. Patient trust and quality of life are equally crucial. Several posters addressed healthcare mistrust and the impact of chemotherapy on enjoyment of day-to-day life, including the devastating loss of musical ability for some patients. We must be cautious in celebrating our victories. Moving the needle on metrics is meaningful, but we must also consider what matters most to patients.



The Next Generation of Oncology

The young voices in oncology were particularly impressive this year. While senior clinicians and researchers presented groundbreaking science, the real joy was engaging with young investigators in the poster sessions. Their commitment to advancing patient care and pushing the envelope in critical areas was inspiring.

Having recently earned my board certification as a patient advocate, I know I will be better in this role thanks to conversations with young oncologists, young pharmacists, and others committed to moving the profession forward, not just scientifically, but socially and economically as well. I encourage everyone to engage with these future leaders at the next annual meeting. My advice would be to make a direct path for the poster sessions next year, meet the folks who will be leaders in the world of oncology in the next generation, and figure out how to collaborate with these young minds in our own businesses to enhance insights, considerations, and perspectives.



Revolutionizing Cancer Treatment: The Era of Personalized Testing

Testing and diagnostics were prominently featured this year, highlighting advancements that help identify patients who might benefit from specific therapies. The goal is to tailor treatments to individual patients, ensuring they receive the most effective therapy with manageable side effects. The oncology community is making strides in developing technologies to help identify subsets of patients who might benefit from targeted therapies. However, there's still work to be done in refining operational processes and improving access to these tests for many patients. My advocacy work emphasizes the importance of focusing not just on patients as a group, but on each specific patient. While it's valuable to know which a subpopulation with a particular mutation or biomarker a patient belongs to, what patients want is to be assured that their treatment will be effective and that any side effects are worth the trade-off for better and longer survival.

Broad Clinical Team: Beyond the Oncologist and Hematologist

Cancer treatment extends beyond the medical oncologist and hematologist to include the entire care team. This year's meeting highlighted the critical roles of pharmacists, surgeons, radiation oncologists, social workers, therapists, and others.

We saw how pharmacists, including remote ones, improve regimen choices and the safety of the administration process for patients in the cancer community. We observed that with surgeries, prehabilitation and rehabilitation enhance the quality of life during the procedure and throughout recovery. We recognize the value of social workers in meeting patients where they are and bridging care gaps, whether economic or societal, to guarantee equal opportunity for favorable outcomes. Effective communication with the entire care team, using their language and tools, is imperative.

Marketers who engage with diverse teams deliver comprehensive, digestible information and encompassing support to patients. Building strong relationships with all members of the care team can lead to more effective communication and better outcomes for patients.



Innovation in Care Delivery

I often think about access to care, affordability, and the delivery process. Perhaps the biggest news this weekend didn't come out of Chicago but Washington, DC. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) announced changes to the Enhancing Oncology Model (EOM) on Friday, coinciding with the ASCO Annual Meeting.

These changes include a substantial increase to the Monthly Enhanced Oncology Services (MEOS) payment for participating practices, an opportunity to narrow the downside risk corridor, and an extension of the program through 2030. Clearly, CMMI views the EOM and alternative payment models in oncology as the best path forward, providing an opportunity to deliver excellent care for patients with cancer.

We have a few months before seeing how practices evaluate this new opportunity, and perhaps, further refinements by CMMI. It's likely this initiative will grow in impact. Additionally, I'm keeping an eye on potential collaboration between CMMI and the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) on a value-based care model for radiation oncology.

Macro- and Microinnovations

Innovation was abundant at the ASCO Annual Meeting, from large-scale therapeutic advancements to small, impactful new methods. Inexpensive yet significant improvements in palliative care, remote patient monitoring, and early cancer detection were particularly notable.

It is no surprise that innovation was everywhere at the ASCO Annual Meeting, but the extent of that innovation is always astounding. Clearly, in the plenary sessions, we saw more data on how to use some of our best therapeutic tools in new and different indications, which can bring benefits to large groups. At the same time, we saw relatively inexpensive enhancements in palliative care that can make a great deal of difference in patients' lives.

While larger companies showcased significant scientific advances, smaller companies revealed refined methods and measures that may not receive "practice-changing" accolades yet have the potential to profoundly transform patient experiences. I spoke with a team that developed a groundbreaking infusion device, simplifying home-based therapy for patients. This innovation addresses transportation and logistical challenges, ensuring that even individuals in rural or underserved areas can access essential infusions. Additionally, I observed models of remote patient monitoring, enabling patients to remain at home instead of being confined to a hospital bed.

Harnessing Data to Accelerate Early Cancer Diagnosis

I also had a chance to talk to a group in the poster sessions who are looking at ways of taking the mountains of existing data to start identifying patients earlier and accelerate the diagnostic process to identify more cancers at stage I and stage II per AMA rather than stage IV. These breakthroughs don't require large teams or massive investments. They need a small group of dedicated individuals and an event like the ASCO annual meeting to present these solutions to enough people, who can then give patients the opportunity to benefit from these new ideas. It's one of the most exciting aspects of the annual meeting.

When I was running an oncology practice, we were committed to improving the patient's experience from both a clinical and operational perspective. While we had many innovative ideas, the seeds were often planted at congresses like the ASCO annual meeting. We could have that "aha" moment, see a path forward to a brighter future, and be relentless in doing better tomorrow than we did today. Every time I go to the Annual Meeting, I walk away with that same feeling, that with hard work, our tomorrows will be better than today.

Get Involved in Revolutionizing Cancer Care Today!

In summarizing the ASCO Annual Meeting, we see the intersection of the art and science of cancer care, underscored by the personal journeys that make this field so impactful. Amplifying the patient's voice remains paramount, ensuring true representation and engagement in oncology. The next generation of cancer care is poised to revolutionize cancer treatment with personalized testing, supported by broad clinical teams that extend beyond oncologists and hematologists. Innovation in care delivery is driven by both large and small advancements, with data harnessing playing a crucial role in accelerating early cancer diagnosis.



For More Information



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If you're interested in learning more about ASCO or discussing advancements in cancer care, please contact **John Hennessy** from Omnicom Health Group's specialty company, **Valuate Health Consultancy**. John, a Principal and Payer Strategist, has over 30 years of experience in healthcare delivery across various settings. His work at Valuate focuses on payers, providers, and access to medications. Previously, he held leadership roles at Kansas City Cancer Centers, Sarah Cannon, and the University of Kansas Health System.

John is a long-time ASCO member, having served on the Clinical Practice Committee, Practice Guidelines Implementation Network, and the State Affiliates Council; he was also a member of ASCO's Payment Reform Task Force, which developed the Patient-Centered Oncology Payment (PCOP) alternative payment model. John has been a consultant with ASCO's Practice Support group to review oncology practices for patient-focused and value-based care readiness.

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