



COA Patient Advocacy Network
Community Oncology Alliance

Background

Historically, community oncology practices have attempted to shield their patients as much as possible from the financial concerns of cancer treatment. Prior to implementation of the Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA), most practices were able to treat the majority of patients with inadequate insurance coverage. In today's climate, practices are unable to shield their patients from the harsh realities of cancer care finances. Reimbursement for cancer care continues to decline. Additionally, there are increased bureaucratic demands of payment processing (e.g., prior authorizations and treatment denials/restrictions), which further impact cancer patients' care.

In addition to this, the economic crisis has put even more burden on cancer patients. Thomson Reuters conducted a study in May 2008 — *before the full impact of the crisis* — documenting that 12% of cancer patients were foregoing treatment because of inadequate insurance or financial support.¹

In this strained environment, patients' needs for cancer care are starting to outstrip the supply of oncologists. By 2020, the country could face an estimated shortage of up to 4,080 oncologists, which equates to a shortfall of an oncologist for 1 out of 3 cancer patients.²

The path we are on to national healthcare reform will likely further impact cancer care beyond the forces currently at play. Cancer care has become increasingly expensive and the focus too often is on cost, rather than quality. It is important in reforming healthcare that we protect and enhance our ability to deliver quality, accessible, and affordable cancer care, not further harm the cancer care delivery system. ***Patients, caregivers, and survivors need to be more informed advocates for their cancer care.***

Concept/Purpose

The Community Oncology Alliance (COA) is a national organization dedicated to fostering quality, affordable, and accessible cancer care in the community setting. COA is creating the *COA Patient Advocacy Network (CPAN)*, which will bring together volunteers from the cancer patient community — patients, caregivers, and survivors — who are interested in:

- Being more actively involved in understanding the issues impacting cancer care;
- Creating an environment wherein they have more say in advocating for cancer care; and
- Partnering with their providers in advocacy initiatives aimed at assuring Americans have access to quality, affordable cancer care.

There is an important distinction, however, between *CPAN* and other patient advocacy initiatives, in that *CPAN* is focused on helping patients advocate in cooperation with their oncology practices. This union of patients, physicians, nurses, and staff will be a major force in the ensuring cancer patients' access to quality, affordable cancer care.

¹ *The Cost of Cancer*, Thomson Reuters, October 23, 2008

² Erikson et al: Future Supply and Demand for Oncologists: Challenges to Assuring Access to Oncology Services; *Journal of Oncology Practice*, 2:79-86, 2007

Mission

The mission of the *COA Patient Advocacy Network* is two-fold:

- Provide a forum for patients, caregivers, and survivors to network in becoming more active participants in understanding and advocating for cancer care
- Provide community oncology practices with information and resources to help their patients deal with the economic pressures impacting their cancer care

Goals

- Create a nationwide network of the cancer patient community that is not disease specific — such as specific to breast, lung, colon, etc — but rather representative of all cancer diagnoses
- Educate the cancer patient community on public policy and other issues that impact access to quality, affordable cancer care
- Provide community oncology practices with materials and other communications that help their patients understand the issues impacting their cancer care
- Educate the cancer patient community on how to become advocates for cancer care
- Advocate for equal access to quality, affordable cancer care

Structure

The broader scope of activities of *CPAN* is overseen by Mary Kruczynski. The Patient Advocacy Committee of COA, chaired by Richard Frame, MD, provides oversight. Dr. Frame is a practicing medical oncologist from Utah and is former president of the American Cancer Society, Utah Division.

The *CPAN* leadership team will be comprised of 15 volunteers from the cancer patient community who will act as regional chairs. Under this team will be state volunteers. These individuals will in turn manage a grassroots network at the state level.

CPAN will have a website and will employ other communication tools to network the cancer patient community.

Participation

The *COA Patient Advocacy Network* is actively looking for volunteers from the cancer patient community. We are seeking individuals — patients, caregivers, and survivors — who understand the challenges of cancer, are interested in advocating for cancer care, and are enthusiastic contributors.

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