Global Initiatives to Enhance Cancer Care in Areas of Limited Resources: What ASCO Members Are Doing and How You Can Become Involved

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OVERVIEW

Cancer is the leading cause of death worldwide. In 2008, 7.6 million deaths were attributable to cancer, representing 13% of all deaths. Malignancies of the lung, stomach, liver, colon, and breast account for the most cancer deaths each year. It is estimated that approximately 30% of cancer deaths are attributable to the five leading behavioral and dietary risks. These include high body mass index, low fruit and vegetable intake, lack of physical activity, and tobacco and alcohol use. A number of viral infections, such as hepatitis B and C and HPV, are responsible for approximately 20% of cancer deaths. Approximately 70% of cancer deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries. Because of the increased numbers of elderly individuals and improved control of comorbidity, deaths from cancer worldwide are projected to continue rising, with an estimated 13.1 million deaths in 2030. To meet this need, the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) has evolved into a truly international organization. Over one-third of ASCO members practice in over 100 countries, representing the world’s largest collection of expertise and insight into the treatment of cancer. More than one-half of ASCO’s Annual Meeting attendees come from outside the United States. The Journal of Clinical Oncology is read by more than 24,000 subscribers worldwide and is available in a number of different languages. To fulfill its mission, ASCO has a number of international programs for sharing knowledge and providing the tools to assist clinicians worldwide in treating their patients. These programs include mentoring and knowledge exchange, education initiatives, and scientific and educational meetings. This provides ample opportunity for involvement to enhance cancer care worldwide.
developing countries to expand their oncology capacity, deepening the skills of investigators in developing countries, mentoring future leaders, and making quality-of-care tools and products more accessible to cancer clinicians around the world.

ASCO is truly an international organization. It has more than 30,000 members, one-third of whom practice in over 100 countries, representing the world’s largest collection of expertise and insight on the treatment of cancer. More than one-half of ASCO’s 30,000 meeting attendees come from outside the United States. ASCO’s Journal of Clinical Oncology (JCO) is an important means of communication with oncologists worldwide. Approximately 24,000 receive international JCO editions in many languages including Mandarin Chinese, Czech, French, German, Hungarian, Italian (online only), Japanese (online only), Polish, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish. Special editions in English are available in India, Greece, North Africa, and the Middle East.

MENTORING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

International Cancer Corps

ASCO’s support of Health Volunteers Overseas (HVO), an international medical education organization, provides an opportunity to strengthen cancer care medical centers in low-resource countries. By volunteering for HVO’s education and training programs through the International Cancer Corps, oncology professionals can share their medical expertise and build long-term, supportive relationships with the clinicians who provide cancer care in these countries. HVO has 85 projects in 25 countries, and HVO volunteers have trained, mentored, and educated more than 3,000 health professionals annually.

HVO pairs an eligible oncology professional with a medical center where the training needs of the facility match the volunteer’s expertise. Volunteers spend 1 to 4 weeks onsite where they teach and train staff, residents, and students and gain insight on the center’s cancer management needs and challenges.

Volunteers must be appropriately trained and credentialed medical professionals who specialize in oncology. This includes physicians (medical, radiation, surgical oncology, and other specialists), laboratory professionals, and nurses. Final-year oncology fellows will be accepted if paired with an experienced volunteer. HVO currently offers three sites for volunteers:

- Tegucigalpa, Honduras—This program focuses on the ongoing development of an oncology training program for both adult and pediatric oncology at three centers in Tegucigalpa: the Hospital Escuela, the Hospital San Felipe, and the Cancer Center Emma Callejas.
- Hue, Vietnam—The volunteer program at Hue College of Medicine and Pharmacy will focus on developing curriculum and providing training on a wide variety of cancer disease types and palliative care.
- Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—Volunteers assigned here will help establish a three-year clinical oncology residency program at Tikur Anbessa (Black Lion) Hospital. Volunteers will also provide training to residents currently enrolled in the hospital’s internal medicine training program, as well as more specialized oncologic training to surgeons, radiotherapy specialists, nurses, pathologists, and other health care professionals.

International Development and Education Award (IDEA)

This program promotes the development of oncologists in low-income countries and shares knowledge between these oncologists and ASCO members. The program pairs IDEA recipients with ASCO members and enables recipients to attend the Annual Meeting in the hope that long-term relationships to improve care in their countries will develop.

Long-Term International Fellowship (LIFE)

This fellowship enables early career member oncologists in developing countries and their mentors to extend their collaborations through research fellowships at mentors’ institutions.

International Cancer Technology Transfer (ICRETT) Fellowship

This program provides opportunities for health care professionals to acquire, exchange, and disseminate knowledge and transfer it from those who have it to those who need it. It allows physicians to conduct research or receive clinical training at a host institution abroad for 1 to 3 months. This program partners with the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC).

EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

Global Curriculum (GC)

The GC is a set of recommendations developed by ASCO and ESMO for the training of medical oncologists. It consists of an outline of medical oncology training topics that includes basic scientific principles, the management and treatment of individual cancers, psychosocial aspects of cancer, patient education, bioethics, legal and economic issues, and specific skills such as anticancer agent administration. The GC has
been adopted by countries around the world as a benchmark for the training of medical oncologists.

**Multidisciplinary Cancer Management Course (MCMC)**
Targeting clinicians in developing countries, the MCMC is designed to improve the level of cancer care and promote a multidisciplinary approach to treatment. This course is designed for physicians in countries where patients with cancer are frequently treated by nonspecialists. ASCO works with the host oncology society to tailor content to the needs and interests of the audience. Training sites include Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, South Africa, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates.

**Advanced Cancer Courses**
Aimed at experienced oncologists, advanced cancer courses are selected from ASCO educational products and symposia that interest members of other oncology societies. These societies partner with ASCO to tailor the training content and identify faculty. Courses include the following:
- Cancer Care in the Older Population
- International Clinical Trials Workshop
- Cancer Prevention
- EPEC-O: Palliative Care
- Australia and Asia-Pacific Clinical Oncology and Research Development

**Workshop (ACORD)**
For this initiative, ASCO partners with the Medical Oncology Group of Australia, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia, European Society of Medical Oncology, and American Association for Cancer Research. Targeting junior oncologists worldwide, this course provides in-depth training in clinical research methods. It covers protocol design, ethics, barriers to research, and other topics through lectures, workshops, small group discussions, and panel discussions.

**SCIENTIFIC AND EDUCATIONAL MEETINGS**

**Joint Symposia**
ASCO works with a broad array of peer oncology societies to hold joint symposia that showcase oncology themes selected to fit the needs of the region. The International Affairs Committee reviews proposals for joint symposia on a case-by-case basis.

**Best of ASCO International**
Recognizing that it is impossible for many international oncologists to travel to the ASCO Annual Meeting, ASCO works with its partner societies to bring highlights of the Annual Meeting to them. A panel of ASCO experts selects the most important research presented at the ASCO Annual Meeting to create Best of ASCO. The Society works with its partner societies to tailor a licensed Best of ASCO meeting that meets the needs of their membership. ASCO members often serve as faculty, with local faculty providing clinical context.

**CONCLUSION**
ASCO has truly become an international organization of oncology experts. To meet the challenge of the worldwide increase in cancer, it has developed a number of programs to foster international interchange, growth, and educational development. It is hoped that these initiatives will raise the standard of cancer care worldwide. These programs provide members with a number of opportunities to participate and offer their expertise to areas of the world where it is needed the most.