



Building a Culture of Excellence in Cancer Education: a Message from Your President

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I am humbled and honored to serve as the new president of the American Association of Cancer Education (AACE). I have been a member for the past 11 years and like many of you, joined at the recommendation of a colleague. Dr. Ajit Sachdeva, past president of AACE, a surgeon, and director of the Division of Education at the American College of Surgeons said, “You need to be a part of this organization, they are the leaders in cancer education.” I joined and attended my first meeting in 2007 and have not missed a meeting since that time.

What most impressed me about the meeting and the AACE in general was the mentorship, diversity, and breadth of educators. I recall at my first meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, my lunch table included a surgeon, radiologist, social worker, nurse, epidemiologist, and a barber—yes, a barber who was a major leader in an education initiative out of UAB focused on prostate screening. We all looked at our cancer education role through a different lens—and it was our diversity and multi-disciplinary discussion that resulted in a strong unified intervention model.

Mentorship is by far one of the reasons that I have embraced this organization. Again, I think back to my first meeting and the offering of a cancer education research mentoring session. I came prepared with my one-page research summary, talking points, and a surgical skills home training kit to present to a range of research experts, including the NCI and multiple Deans and cancer education leaders. While I was hoping for something like the TV show “Shark Tank” that is, on-the-spot funding because all were enamored by my idea—that of course did not

happen. But I did receive excellent feedback and next steps. Thanks to a clear plan from my mentors, I am happy to report that grant funding has supported the distribution and evaluation of over 120,000 home skills kits for patients needing an ostomy, feeding tube, central line, or home drain as part of their post-operative cancer treatment.

Our Association Presidents often focus on one new initiative. Two years ago, under the leadership of Dr. Amr Soliman, it was international outreach. Last year, under the direction of Dr. Maria Bishop, our focus was on mentorship. For 2018, my vision is to develop our strategic plan and set us apart as the premier association focused on cancer education. I recall when Steve Jobs was rebuilding Apple and he spoke of the power of focus, and that you need to lay out a grand vision and then make it happen. The strategic plan will include greater opportunities for involvement of members within the committees and special interest groups resulting in innovative educational interventions, research, and scholarship in cancer education.

Someone asked me at our last meeting why we need an association for cancer education, aren't all professionals experts in educating about cancer. The answer is definitely NO! I am reminded as a pediatric nurse, of our efforts to control asthma. Asthma mortality was increasing, even though we had new inhalers and medications that should be working. What was missing was an educational plan to incorporate best practice, a method for evaluation and agreement on the most important end points to determine effectiveness. Cancer is a complex disease and needs a comprehensive plan that recognizes vulnerable populations and includes prevention, environmental control, communication, knowledge, and treatment and symptom management. AACE, and our multi-disciplinary talent pool of educators, is the group to champion excellence in education to reduce the burden of cancer worldwide. I look forward to our future and the continued promotion and recognition of excellence and scholarship in cancer education.

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