



Massachusetts Society of  
Clinical Oncologists

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Welcome to the first issuing of the President's Corner. As I have thought about this column and what it may include, many thoughts have entered (and exited) my head. My first thought was to have a small area of MSCO's newsletter dedicated to topics relevant to MSCO's advocacy efforts to improve care for our patients in the Commonwealth. Then, I thought maybe I should keep it light and talk about subjects other than medicine that may rejuvenate oncologists as they care for their patients. Another thought was to try and capture some of our patients' trials and tribulations, including the myriad ways our special patients and their families cope with their diseases. Many other thoughts came to mind about this column as I continued to struggle over what may be the best subject matter to discuss. While grappling, MSCO has begun developing many new exciting initiatives. We are partnering with a non-profit organization called Ovarians for the Cure to help their ongoing efforts to help support patients with ovarian cancer. We look forward to joining one of Ovarians for the Cure's patient- awareness events, "A Patient Living with Ovarian Cancer", which will be followed by lighting the Prudential Tower teal in recognition of September as Ovarian Cancer Awareness month. We will also be partnering with the American College of Surgeons to host a legislative breakfast in October to discuss access to mammograms and preventive oncology with Massachusetts legislators and their staff. This new initiative is consistent with MSCO's ongoing efforts to monitor legislation that provides and protects access to cancer care for our patients. These legislative developments are changing all the time just like the field of oncology with innovations in cancer research and treatments. MSCO has consistently supported the ACS CAN Research Breakfast and this year met with a young, promising researcher who will be attending MSCO's annual meeting in November. Any one of these by itself would be an excellent topic for the President's Corner. How to choose?

So as I was deliberating about this column, its context, and continuing to be a full time oncologist, husband, father, etc., I had an epiphany. I named this column the President's Corner because here I am in my little corner looking out over a vast room. There is so much more going on in my room, which consists mostly of Milford. But your room could be Boston, Springfield, Worcester, or your hometown. Each of us is in their own corner of their room doing their thing, looking out and trying to help everyone in the room as best that they can. I am going to write about all those issues mentioned above and what I think about what may be going on in this room. However, I want to hear about other people's corners and what is going on in their room, in their world, in

their part of town, and how they look out over their room. I invite physicians, oncology nurses, PAs, and NPs to send me their thoughts and experiences like those mentioned above so that I can help distribute and connect with their story here in my corner.

I came to this epiphany in a story I will share with you. I had a patient who developed small cell carcinoma of the bladder. He was an elderly gentleman who had stage 4 disease. I treated him for several years until he passed away comfortably on hospice. During our many visits together, he would talk to me about hiking in the White Mountains with his wife who had passed away and how they loved being together especially in the mountains. Similarly, I also enjoy hiking with my daughter and friends. It became customary that each visit my patient and I would enjoy talking about our hikes after discussing medical matters. At each visit I noticed his eyes and face would light-up with a renewed freshness when it came time to talk about hiking. I felt sad when his health gradually declined so that he was eventually no longer able to walk. At one point he must have seen this in my eyes because he caringly told me not to worry, and that he had his time in the mountains and that he took comfort in knowing that I enjoyed them with those I love and care for. He enjoyed reliving and remembering, describing, and discussing his experiences on his hikes, reliving them as if he was there all over again.

This past weekend I hiked Mount Washington with my daughter, her friend and another physician, and as I was on my way down from the summit looking at the mountain, I thought of my patient and my experiences with him. I looked at the people passing us going up the mountain and coming down, at my daughter and her friend and I hope that when all is said and done that we can all relive these moments as if they are happening again, and again, and again. But at that point I knew I had to be in the moment, and I was taking in everything around me as much as I could. I was looking out from my corner of the room, but also being part of the room. This was my epiphany, we as oncologists do much for our patients in so many ways, and they also do much for us as well. We need to preserve this function, preserve ourselves, and keep focus on what is most important. This column will be about how we can improve care for our patients (preserving that time with our patients during our visits), about how we as oncologists can rejuvenate ourselves and how that relates to our everyday life (hiking, etc...), and the ways patients cope with their disease and health state (by reliving, through storytelling, there most memorable times). That is what this column will be about, and that is what is happening in my corner of the room.

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