FROM THE CO-CHAIRS
PETER J. O’DWYER, MD (LEFT), AND MITCHELL D. SCHNALL, MD, PhD
NOVEMBER 2019

We thank all of you who participated in our recent ECOG-ACRIN Group Meeting in Fort Lauderdale. Attendance was again among the highest we have had for an EA meeting, and especially gratifying was the broad range of experience among the investigators who registered. We urge institutions to devote resources to helping early-career investigators, nurses and data managers, and allied scientists travel to our meetings. They bring back new ideas, new approaches, and collaborative connections that can complement and amplify existing institutional research activities.

With the goal of facilitating participation, our meeting will have a new format in Baltimore next May. We will start the meeting a day earlier (on Wednesday), and conclude by the middle of the day on Friday. This move is intended to diminish the impact on family activities and responsibilities. By condensing some of the administrative meetings, we plan to extend the time available for scientific committees; less overlap among committees will allow broader participation across disciplines, to enable better trials. We will also rework the schedule to maximize participation in our two plenary sessions: the Robert L. Comis Translational Science Symposium, and the General Session.

This meeting saw progress in several of the overarching scientific goals of ECOG-ACRIN. The Comis Symposium focused on Big Data, with a stellar cast of expert speakers who mapped out a research space that may have been unfamiliar to some of our investigators. Not unfamiliar conceptually of course: we are surrounded by examples of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and the internet of things in our daily existence. Less clear, however, is how our research can dovetail with technology, and become more impactful as a consequence. The symposium incorporated some of the use-case scenarios envisaged by several of our members, and this theme will be developed further in future meetings, including in the newly-established Big Data Committee. There is opportunity to bring forward ideas, and to participate and lead in projects that are in their earliest stages.

Progress in another direction was made in terms of the impact of EA in society, specifically in understanding cancer risk, and susceptible populations. At this meeting we were fortunate to be joined by Dr. Otis Brawley (pictured left), Bloomberg Distinguished Professor in both the School of Public Health and the Kimmel Cancer Center at Johns Hopkins. Dr. Brawley convened the first meeting of the Social Determinants of Health Working Group, a new forum that he is chairing to help us generate multidisciplinary studies that engage several committees. He also delivered a riveting address on this topic at the General Session. There was clear enthusiasm for novel ways of considering the cancer problem, and how our EA trials can impact it.

For early to mid-career investigators, these broader research directions are designed to complement the specific research questions in the discipline-related committees. Both in the Big Data and Social Determinants areas, the need will also be to develop specific and detailed questions that will engage well-characterized patient populations. It sometimes appears that our research efforts are siloed, limited to a specific discipline. Scientific progress depends on the rigor that such a structure imposes, but the opportunity for new science often emerges from different ways of thinking about issues, and new approaches. We invite participation, and believe that these opportunities can lead to exciting discoveries.
**RECENTLY ACTIVATED: EA4181 TRIAL FOR MANTLE CELL LYMPHOMA**

Mantle cell lymphoma (MCL) is an aggressive form of lymphoma, and the optimal upfront treatment is still unknown. This phase II trial, led by Nina D. Wagner-Johnston, MD (Johns Hopkins), will compare three chemotherapy regimens consisting of bendamustine, rituximab, high dose cytarabine, and acalabrutinib and evaluate how well each one works in treating patients with newly diagnosed MCL. Learn more.

**IMPROVING CANCER CARE FOR SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES**

**EDITH P. MITCHELL, MD**
**CO-CHAIR, HEALTH EQUITY COMMITTEE**

The ECOG-ACRIN Health Equity Committee was established to help ensure that the needs of special populations permeate the science of ECOG-ACRIN through research aimed at health disparities. The Committee embraces a broad definition of underserved populations, including adolescents and young adults, elderly, racial/ethnic minorities, rural residents, and sexual and gender minorities (SGMs). A new survey study is now in progress concerning SGMs and its aim is to evaluate clinician cultural competency in providing care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) adults with cancer.

Currently there is a substantial lack of knowledge regarding cancer treatment for SGMs and also significant gaps in what is known concerning provider attitudes and practice behaviors toward LGBTQ patients. The goal of this survey, led by Matthew B. Schabath, PhD of Moffitt Cancer Center, is to increase knowledge and reduce barriers to clinical trial participation among this population which is typically not included in medical research, so we can better understand how to serve these most vulnerable patients as their need for clinical cancer prevention, diagnostic and treatment services arises.

This study coincides with a recent report by the National Institutes of Health, *Sexual and Gender Minority Research Working Group: A Working Group of the Council of Councils*, which identifies research aimed at improving SGM health as a priority. Learn more about this survey below from Dr. Schabath, and contact us if you are interested in participating.

**PROVIDER SURVEY ON CARING FOR LGBTQ+ PATIENTS**

**MATTHEW B. SCHABATH, PhD**

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) community, also referred to as sexual and gender minorities (SGMs), is a diverse and medically-underserved population that is often marginalized in a predominantly hetero- and cisgender-normative society. Estimates for the size of this community vary; studies have reported 3.4% to 12% of the adult population in the United States identifies as LGBT. Although the growing body of evidence demonstrates the LGBT population experiences increased risk for certain cancers, there have been limited efforts to address cancer disparities by sexual orientation and gender identity.

Because cancer disparities in the SGM community is a largely ignored public health issue, there is a gap in SGM-specific evidence-based clinical practice guidelines and best practice behaviors across the cancer care continuum from prevention to survivorship. In addition to having a welcoming and inclusive environment, providers should deliver culturally sensitive and clinically knowledgeable care to LGBTQ patients. To generate a relevant curriculum that addresses cancer disparities in LGBTQ patients, an assessment must be conducted to identify attitudes, gaps in knowledge, and practice behaviors among providers.

To that end, ECOG-ACRIN is conducting a survey study designed to assess oncology caregivers’ awareness of issues affecting the health needs of LGBTQ+ patients in the oncology setting. The survey will be completed by healthcare providers, physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, navigators, and CRAs who interact with patients. It is hoped that the results will provide the foundation for an oncology-specific program of research to improve care delivery and reduce disparities among LGBTQ adults with cancer.

This survey will build upon *work recently published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology* about a nationwide study of oncologists that assessed knowledge, attitudes, and institutional practices of LGBTQ patients with cancer.
SABCS HONORS EA VICE CHAIR JOSEPH A. SPARANO, MD

Joseph A. Sparano, MD, will receive the William L. McGuire Memorial Lecture Award at the 2019 San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS), to be held Dec. 10-14. Joe is being recognized for a career distinguished by leadership, collaboration, and practice-changing achievements in clinical and translational breast cancer research that have improved the lives of patients.

The McGuire Award was established in 1992 to honor the late William L. McGuire, MD, who, along with Charles A. Coltman, MD, founded SABCS in 1977.

A member of EA since 1991, and currently our Vice Chair, Joe is Associate Director for Clinical Research at the Albert Einstein Cancer Center, Associate Chairman in the Department of Oncology at Montefiore Medical Center, and Professor of Medicine and Women's Health at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, a main member institution of EA since 1972. He has been Co-Principal Investigator and contact PI for the Montefiore Minority Underserved NCORP since 2014.

Joe has played a key role in the design and implementation of numerous EA clinical trials. Notably, he served as study chair for the recently reported TAILORx trial. This NCI-sponsored, multi-center trial of 10,273 patients with early-stage breast cancer found that most do not benefit from chemotherapy. The data confirmed that using the 21-gene expression test to assess the risk of cancer recurrence can spare many women unnecessary treatment. The findings, publicized around the world, immediately changed clinical practice.

Joe also led an EA effort funded by the Komen Foundation and Breast Cancer Research Foundation to demonstrate use of a simple blood test to detect circulating tumor cells. This test may potentially identify women at high risk for having a recurrence of breast cancer five or more years after their initial treatment. The data encouraged the NCI Breast Cancer Steering Committee to undertake further study.

Over the course of his career, Joe's research on biomarkers of recurrence and prognosis has moved the field forward and led to more effective, personalized treatments for cancer patients. Among his peers, he is lauded for his organizational skills and recognized as a committed mentor. In 2001, for example, he initiated the Young Investigator Symposium, now an annual event, that has introduced more than 200 young clinical, translational, and basic cancer research scientists to EA.

Joe's award lecture, "What Would Bill Think?", will be a major event at SABCS. The lecture takes place on Wednesday, December 11th at 11:15 AM Central Time. Joe plans to review progress made in breast cancer management over his career, and outline remaining challenges.

EA FEATURES EIGHT YOUNG INVESTIGATORS

EA recently held its annual Young Investigator Symposium where eight early-career investigators presented their research projects. The symposium is a professional mentoring event for those engaged in clinical, translational, imaging, or basic cancer research, or in non-cancer related research that has application to cancer biology, prevention, screening, diagnosis, imaging, or treatment.

Two presenters were selected for awards of distinction, taking into consideration the merit of their research, quality of the presentation delivery, command of the topic, and ability to respond to related questions. The recipients of the awards are Samilia Obeng-Gyasi, MD, MPH (Indiana University), whose work was recently accepted for a poster presentation at the 2019 San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium, for clinical research and Charlie Kuang, MD, PhD (University of Pittsburgh) for translational research.

All 2019 presenters are posted on ecog-acrin.org, along with a full description of the program and eligibility requirements.
NEWS IN BRIEF
Is something new or noteworthy happening at your institution? Send your updates to support@ecog-acrin.org.

SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS FROM EA MEMBER INSTITUTIONS ELECTED TO THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

The individuals listed below are among the 90 recently elected regular members of the National Academy of Medicine.

Denise R. Aberle, MD (UCLA), former member of the EA Principal Investigator Committee, for leading the National Cancer Institute-sponsored National Lung Screening Trial, in which low-dose CT screening was shown to reduce lung cancer mortality by 20 percent over chest radiographic screening.

David Cella, PhD (Northwestern), Co-Chair of EA’s Cancer Control and Survivorship Committee, for his work in identifying and measuring what matters to people seeking health care, which has paved the way for patient-centered care.

Elizabeth M. Jaffee, MD (Johns Hopkins), for elucidating the complex interactions between T cell subsets and cancer and translating those findings into two generations of vaccine platforms to develop pancreatic cancer antigen and biomarker discovery approaches.

AL B. BENSON III, MD OF NORTHWESTERN APPOINTED DEPUTY CHAIR, POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION FOR EA

Al B. Benson III, MD was recently appointed Deputy Chair, Policy and Implementation of ECOG-ACRIN. This new position within EA’s executive leadership will prove key to the Group’s continued success as a leading cancer research organization. To this role, Dr. Benson will bring expertise in program and guideline development, a skillset critical to developing a focused integrated research program. In particular, he will lead efforts to reduce distinction between academic and community participants to recognize real world opportunities and community leadership.

Dr. Benson is an active member of ECOG-ACRIN, serving as Chair of the Data Safety Monitoring Committee, Co-Chair of the NCORP Community Advisory Committee, and Co-Chair of the Cancer Care Delivery Research Committee.

ECO-ACRIN COMMITTEE LEADERS ON THE MOVE

John M. Kirkwood, MD (University of Pittsburgh), stepped down as Chair of the Melanoma Committee to become the new Co-Chair of the Prevention, Screening and Surveillance Committee and Chair of the Prevention Subcommittee. He replaces Raymond C. Bergan, MD (OHSU) in this role.

Jedd D. Wolchok, MD (Memorial Sloan Kettering) was appointed Chair of the Melanoma Committee, filling the vacancy left by Dr. Kirkwood.

Matthias Weiss, MD, PhD (ThedaCare) was elected by the Principal Investigator Committee to be its Representative for Affiliate Members, a role that extends to the Executive Committee. He replaces Gary I. Cohen, MD (GBMC) in these roles. Dr. Weiss also serves as Chair of the Community Cancer Committee.

Keith T. Flaherty, MD (Massachusetts General Hospital) is now Co-Chair of the Scientific Planning Committee, replacing EA Group Co-Chair Peter J. O’Dwyer, MD (University of Pennsylvania) in this role.

NEW TAILORx DATA PUBLISHED IN JAMA ONCOLOGY, PRESENTED AT ESMO 2019

A new analysis from the TAILORx breast cancer trial, led by Joseph A. Sparano, MD (Montefiore), was published in JAMA Oncology and orally presented at the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) Congress in late September. The analysis reveals the clinical outcomes with chemotherapy in a subset of 1,389 women with a high Recurrence Score (RS) of 26-100. The new data show that the estimated rate of freedom from recurrence of breast cancer at a distant site was 93% at five years, an outcome much better than expected with endocrine therapy alone.

LATEST TMIST NEWSLETTER NOW AVAILABLE

TMIST In case you missed it, the third quarter 2019 edition of the TMIST Newsletter is now available. Read the full issue for important study updates and reminders. Subscribe here.