ASCO 50th Anniversary Poll Names the Top 5 Advances from the Past 50 Years

Results Released Ahead of the “Rally for Medical Research” on Capitol Hill, September 18th – New Cancer Research Funding Urgently Needed
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The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) today announced the “Top 5 Advances in 50 Years of Modern Oncology,” based on results of worldwide voting on CancerProgress.Net – ASCO’s interactive website documenting the history of progress against cancer. The “Top 5 in 50” results identify pivotal discoveries in chemotherapy, prevention, molecularly targeted therapy and supportive care that have stood the test of time, and upon which further discoveries have since been based.

Importantly, federal research funding played a role in many of these advances, which were announced a day ahead of the 2nd annual Rally for Medical Research Hill Day on September 18, in Washington, D.C. The goal of this event is to call attention to the real and meaningful progress that has been made because of the federal investment in medical research through the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Patients and advocates will also join in a call to Congress for greater funding for the NIH, which actually lost almost a quarter of its purchasing power in the last decade, adjusting for inflation.

“Progress builds on progress. Over the past five decades, NIH-funded research has transformed the outlook for people with cancer. These Top 5 in 50 highlight transformational discoveries that represent a shining sliver of what we have learned from a sustained investment in federally funded research,” said ASCO President Peter P. Yu, MD, FASCO. “However, without greater federal investment going forward, the pace of progress against cancer and other diseases will be far slower. We’re already seeing more high-quality research grants being turned down and a projected 40 percent cut to patient enrollment in NIH-funded cancer clinical trials, just since 2009.”

ASCO SURVEY – TOP 5 ADVANCES IN 50 YEARS OF MODERN ONCOLOGY

The “Top 5 in 50” vote was conducted between December 2013 and July 2014, as part of ASCO’s 50th anniversary celebration. The ballot consisted of 32 clinical research advances that occurred since ASCO’s founding in 1964 and are included in the Major Milestones Timeline of CancerProgress.Net.

“All of these advances mark major turning points for cancer care and have improved and saved the lives of countless Americans,” said Dr. Yu. “Federally-funded research answers questions that are critically important to patients, questions that would otherwise go unanswered – like comparing the effectiveness of two regimens, exploring new uses for generic drugs, finding new ways to improve patients’ quality of life and testing truly novel approaches like many of those highlighted in the Top 5 in 50 announced today.”
With more than 2,000 votes cast by physicians, patients and the public, following are the “Top 5 Advances in Modern Oncology:”

1. **Chemotherapy cures advanced Hodgkin lymphoma** - In the first chemotherapy breakthrough for advanced cancer in adults, a four-drug combination chemotherapy regimen – called “MOPP” – induced long-term remissions in over half of patients with aggressive Hodgkin lymphoma. The 1965 discovery sparked the first hope that advanced cancers could be cured with drug treatment, and paved the way for 90 percent cure rates for patients with this disease today.

2. **HPV vaccine approved to prevent cervical cancer** - The Food and Drug Administration’s 2006 approval of the first human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, Gardasil, protects against the two strains of HPV known to cause most cervical cancers. Widespread vaccination, if fully implemented, stands to drive dramatic reductions in cervical and other HPV-related cancers in the U.S. and worldwide.

3. **Targeted drug transforms treatment of chronic myelogenous leukemia** - The rapid FDA review and approval of imatinib (Gleevec) in 2001 dramatically changed the treatment of patients with chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML). This easy-to-take daily pill – which targets a molecular defect present in nearly all patients with CML – turned a disease with almost no long-term survivors into one with five-year survival rates of 90 percent. It also ushered in a new era of successful research on molecularly targeted treatments for many more cancers.

4. **Chemotherapy cures men with testicular cancer** - A new three-drug combination chemotherapy regimen – called “PVB” – produced complete remissions and some cures for more than 70 percent of men with advanced testicular cancer. Earlier chemotherapy treatments worked in just 5 percent of men. This 1977 discovery, coupled with later surgery, radiation and chemotherapy advances, made testicular cancer one of the most curable cancers and one of oncology’s biggest success stories.

5. **Powerful anti-nausea drugs dramatically improve many patients’ quality of life** - The FDA approval of the anti-nausea drug, ondansetron (Zofran) – in 1991, as well as other supportive care drugs in the following years – dramatically changed the experience of cancer treatment, bringing unprecedented improvements to patients’ quality of life. These drugs not only bring relief from intense, treatment-induced nausea, but make it possible for patients to avoid once-routine hospital stays, complete their full course of treatment and live longer and better lives.

Every year, ASCO tracks important advances in clinical cancer research with its Clinical Cancer Advances report, drawing from research published in scientific journals and presented at scientific meetings.

**Need for Federal Research Funding Remains Critical**

During the Rally for Medical Research Hill Day, ASCO will renew its call for increased 2015 budgets for the NIH and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). ASCO is asking for a $5.26 billion budget for the NCI and at least a $32 billion budget for the NIH for the 2015 fiscal year – a request that will allow NIH to protect current projects and begin a plan for growth in future years.

“ASCO’s proposed budget increases for NIH and NCI will help ensure that the nation’s clinical cancer research infrastructure is protected, help attract the nation’s brightest young minds to a career in medicine, and offer future patients access to more and better cures,” added Dr. Yu.

ASCO is co-sponsoring the Rally for Medical Research, which includes meetings with Congressional leaders. Hundreds of medical research and advocacy groups and patients are expected to attend the event spearheaded by the American Association for Cancer Research, joining in a call to Congress for increased research funding for the NIH.

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For further information, read ASCO’s educational series on Federally Funded Cancer Research and view ASCO’s latest video, The Need for Federally-Funded Cancer Clinical Trials.

About ASCO:

Founded in 1964, the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) is the world’s leading professional organization representing physicians who care for people with cancer. With more than 35,000 members, ASCO is committed to improving cancer care through scientific meetings, educational programs and peer-reviewed journals. ASCO is supported by its affiliate organization, the Conquer Cancer Foundation, which funds groundbreaking research and programs that make a tangible difference in the lives of people with cancer. For ASCO information and resources, visit asco.org. Patient-oriented cancer information is available at Cancer.Net.