ASCO Issues New Physician & Patient Resources on Managing Obesity-Related Challenges After a Cancer Diagnosis

New Tools Are Part of ASCO’s Efforts to Address Obesity as a Major Factor in the Nation’s Cancer Burden

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. – The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) today released new resources to help physicians manage the complications of obesity in patients with cancer and facilitate communication about the importance of weight management and making healthy lifestyle choices following a cancer diagnosis.

“Obesity and Cancer: A Guide for Oncology Providers,” and a complementary guide for patients, are key elements of an ASCO-wide effort to help address the impact of obesity, both as a leading cause of cancer and as a complicating factor in the care of cancer patients. Given that nearly two-thirds of the U.S. adult population is overweight or obese,[1] this issue is set to become an increasingly critical consideration in the care of the thousands of Americans diagnosed with cancer every year.

“Obesity is a defining public health challenge for our nation today,” said ASCO President Clifford A. Hudis, MD, FACP. “As oncologists, we have an obligation to take on this challenge, providing ways to reduce the risk of obesity-related cancers, and equipping physicians and patients with the education and tools they need to ensure everyone receives the best possible cancer care.”

Obesity has been linked with an increased risk for many of the most common cancers, including breast, colon, and high-grade prostate cancers. Yet, public awareness about the connection remains low: one recent survey suggested that less than one in 10 Americans even realize that obesity is a risk factor for cancer.[2] Obesity has also been linked to poorer outcomes among patients diagnosed with cancer, including higher risk of side effects, cancer recurrence and mortality. Other data have suggested that weight gain following a cancer diagnosis could also
worsen outcomes, including survival.

ASCO’s new guides are designed to help achieve the best possible outcomes for patients regardless of their weight. They feature a range of helpful tools and information, including:

- Review of the scientific evidence on the link between obesity and poorer cancer outcomes
- Recommendations for providers to help them assist overweight and obese cancer survivors access resources and services to lose weight and become more active
- Tools to help physicians and patients communicate effectively about common challenges patients face
- Guidance on insurance coverage and reimbursement for care related to obesity, including behavioral counseling, rehabilitation services and medical interventions
- Details on obesity-related services available through the Affordable Care Act
- Links to a wide range of additional resources, including relevant clinical practice guidelines and nationally available programs aimed at helping cancer survivors maintain healthy lifestyles

The provider guide and other resources are now available on ASCO’s website, at www.asco.org/obesity. The obesity and cancer provider guide is funded through the Conquer Cancer Foundation with the generous support of Roche and Ethicon Endo-Surgery.

The patient guide, “Managing Your Weight After a Cancer Diagnosis,” and other resources on weight management during and after cancer treatment are available on ASCO’s patient website, Cancer.Net, at www.cancer.net/obesity.

The new resources were developed as a joint effort of ASCO’s Prevention and Survivorship Committees, led by the Energy Balance Work Group, a panel of ASCO member oncologists and other specialists from a range of obesity-related health disciplines. This group was convened by ASCO to develop new tools and resources to achieve change in oncology practice by addressing nutrition, obesity and overall energy balance as it relates to cancer prevention and outcomes.

**ASCO’s Upcoming Priorities on Obesity**

The new educational resources are one part of ASCO’s increasing efforts to address the obesity-cancer connection. Later this year, the Society will issue a policy statement and convene a summit for researchers from a range of obesity-related disciplines to identify and prioritize future research efforts. ASCO is also working to integrate weight management into oncology fellowship training to ensure the next generation of oncologists is prepared to effectively manage obesity-related challenges.

“There are still many unanswered questions remaining in the realm of weight, diet and cancer risk, but we can’t wait for them to be answered before we act,” said Dr. Hudis. “We recognize that cancer cannot be addressed in isolation from obesity’s other harmful effects, but we also need to aggressively build awareness – just as we did years ago with tobacco – that obesity is a major
contributor to the nation’s cancer burden.”

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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.