ASCO Releases Strategic Plan to Increase Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Oncology Workforce

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ALEXANDRIA, Va.— ASCO has released Strategic Plan for Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Oncology Workforce, which aims to promote the development of an oncology workforce that is culturally competent and equipped to care for a diverse population of patients with cancer.

The development of this plan is guided by three primary goals: (1) establish a pathway for increasing workforce diversity, (2) enhance diversity within ASCO leadership, and (3) integrate a focus on diversity across ASCO programs and policies. The plan, which was approved by ASCO’s Board of Directors, focuses on achievable, short-term goals that will enhance existing ASCO programs and create new opportunities to increase the diversity of the oncology workforce.

“With this strategic plan, ASCO is strengthening its commitment to provide meaningful opportunities for medical students, residents, fellows, and practicing oncologists from underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities to participate and shape our priorities and activities,” said ASCO President Daniel F. Hayes, MD, FACP, FASCO. “As a professional medical society, we can do much more to support the recruitment, training, and retention of oncologists from diverse backgrounds, particularly those who are underrepresented in oncology. This is a critically important step in that direction.”

As part of the strategic plan, ASCO will look to improve and expand mentoring opportunities for early medical trainees, residents, and fellows; develop policy recommendations to support diversity in the oncology workforce; establish new career development programs; and ensure existing ASCO programs include a focus on diversity and health equity, where appropriate. Additional tactics are outlined in the strategic plan, which was published today in the Journal of Clinical Oncology.
Lack of Diversity in Oncology Impacts Patient Care

While the population of the United States is growing increasingly diverse, the racial and ethnic diversity of health care providers has not kept pace. For example, 13% of the U.S. population is Black or African American and 18% is Hispanic or Latino, but only 9% of practicing physicians in the United States self-identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. This gap is particularly pronounced in oncology, where only 2% of the physician workforce self-identifies as Black/African American and 3% as Hispanic/Latino. In addition, the proportion of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino oncology fellows is consistently lower than many other fellowships in sub-specialties of internal medicine.

Lack of provider diversity may contribute to health disparities, notes the strategic plan. Although remarkable progress has been made in reducing cancer mortality rates, troubling health disparities still exist in certain populations, as described in ASCO’s recent State of Cancer Care in America report. This is particularly true for Black or African American men and women, who have the highest mortality rates for the most common cancers in the United States. Many complex and interrelated factors underlie these disparities, but research has found that access to culturally competent care plays an important role.

“A more diverse oncology workforce will help ensure access to high-quality care and greater opportunities to participate in life-extending clinical research for minority patients with cancer, both of which are needed to address the persistent disparities in treatment options and health outcomes,” said Karen Winkfield, MD, PhD, Chair of ASCO’s Health Disparities Committee. “This strategic plan will be a clear guidepost for ongoing ASCO efforts to develop a physician workforce that reflects the diversity of the patient population we serve.”

Continuing Commitment to Diversity in Oncology

This strategic plan builds on existing ASCO programs to support and promote diversity in the oncology workforce. Through its Diversity in Oncology Initiatives (DOI), ASCO has distributed awards to medical students and residents who self-identify as underrepresented in medicine. Since its inception in 2008, the program has awarded more than $1.1 million in funding to 136 recipients from 90 different institutions nationwide. DOI awards have allowed recipients to attend ASCO’s Annual Meeting and have supported clinical or clinical research oncology rotations. To date, 105 of the recipients have become ASCO members and many are active volunteers with the organization.

ASCO has convened a work group composed of members of its Health Disparities Committee, Professional Development Committee, and Workforce Advisory Group to oversee the implementation of the ASCO Strategic Plan for Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Oncology Workforce.
The work group will determine measurable outcomes and report annually to ASCO’s Board of Directors and other relevant committees.

Please visit the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* for the full text of the *Strategic Plan for Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Oncology Workforce*.

An illustrated summary of the *strategic plan* is also available.

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1 United States Census. [https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00)
5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Factors that contribute to health disparities in cancer. [www.cdc.gov/cancer/healthdisparities/basic_info/challenges.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/healthdisparities/basic_info/challenges.htm)

**About ASCO:**

Founded in 1964, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, Inc. (ASCO®) is committed to making a world of difference in cancer care. As the world’s leading organization of its kind, ASCO represents more than 40,000 oncology professionals who care for people living with cancer. Through research, education, and promotion of the highest-quality patient care, ASCO works to conquer cancer and create a world where cancer is prevented or cured, and every survivor is healthy. ASCO is supported by its affiliate organization, the Conquer Cancer Foundation. Learn more at [ASCO.org](http://ASCO.org), explore patient education resources at [Cancer.Net](http://Cancer.Net), and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.