Safe Handling of Chemotherapy

The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) is deeply committed to ensuring that patients receive safe and appropriate cancer treatment and to safeguarding all professionals who work with or near oncology drugs in settings where oncology treatments are prepared, delivered, and administered.

ASCO and the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) published updated ASCO/ONS Standards for Safe Chemotherapy Administration in 2013, updating its 2009 patient safety standards addressing the prescription, preparation, and administration of antineoplastic chemotherapy drugs. The standards are consensus-based and created through a review of available evidence and a formal process for obtaining expert stakeholder input.

In November 2014, ASCO convened a Task Force on Safe Handling of Chemotherapy to develop recommendations for updated safety standards that focus on promoting the safety of oncology practice staff involved in chemotherapy preparation and administration. These standards, which are currently being finalized, are evidence-based and will supplement our existing patient safety standards.

Independent oncology practices provide critically important community-based points of access to high-quality, high-value cancer care services for individuals with cancer. These practices are subject to a growing number of administrative burdens and financial pressures. The costs of adhering to additional, expensive requirements for the handling of cancer drugs could place additional physician practices at risk of limiting access to cancer patients or completely ceasing operations. Adding requirements for which there is limited or no evidence, and that do not translate into a meaningful improvement in safety, will divert attention and resources away from activities that promote patient welfare.

As policymakers consider the development of new requirements that apply to the handling of drugs in physician practices, we encourage them to actively involve ASCO and the local medical oncology community, who have significant practical experience in the day-to-day operations of modern oncology practices. ASCO offers its current and future chemotherapy safe handling statements and standards as a resource. It is critical that any new regulatory requirements serve the needs of individuals with cancer, protect the safety of the health care workforce and avoid unnecessary burdens for the oncology practices that serve local communities.

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