

ISOPP: PROMOTING ONCOLOGY PHARMACY PRACTICE WORLDWIDE TO IMPROVE PATIENT CARE

ROWENA N SCHWARTZ, PHARM.D, BCOP; PRESIDENT, ON BEHALF OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF ONCOLOGY PHARMACY PRACTITIONERS (ISOPP)

The value of the oncology pharmacist as a collaborative member of an interdisciplinary cancer care team to best support the complex drug therapy needs of the individual with cancer has been recognized and described in the literature (1). Oncology pharmacists are viewed as the cancer drug therapy experts in many countries, based on their training, expertise and function. The role of the oncology pharmacist has evolved to address many aspects of direct patient care and to support overall cancer care. The role continues to evolve worldwide through the dedication and efforts of oncology pharmacists, local, national and regional oncology pharmacy organizations and ISOPP. The advancement of the role of the oncology pharmacist is key in emerging health systems.

ISOPP, the International Society of Oncology Pharmacy Practitioners, is a nonprofit organization that celebrates 20 years this year. ISOPP's mission is to promote and enhance oncology pharmacy practice worldwide to improve cancer patient care. This mission is accomplished through development and dissemination of practice standards related to oncology pharmacy practice, as well as the development and provision of oncology pharmacy education. The organization supports educational initiatives, promotes and sponsors oncology pharmacy research and provides a forum to optimize both formal and informal networking for oncology pharmacists.

As cancer care continues to progress, it is essential to evaluate changes in cancer drug therapy as well as oncology pharmaceutical care to successfully integrate advances in care into practice as appropriate. A global approach to the evolution is not always appropriate. There is a need to ensure that resources are available to integrate and support integration as countries and regions around the world incorporate changes. ISOPP provides a platform for oncology pharmacists to share ideas and strategies that can be adapted across the world, as well as identify resources (e.g. individuals) that have been part of successful changes within their environment. *The Journal of Oncology Pharmacy Practice* (JOPP), the official publication of ISOPP, provides

the opportunity for members to learn of practices, practice innovations and the individuals who have innovated from across the globe. This forum provides information and shares ideas. JOPP publishes original articles relevant to oncology pharmacy practitioners across the oncology pharmacy specialty. Meeting abstracts for the ISOPP symposiums are published in JOPP ensuring that highlights from the emerging work of pharmacists to optimize oncology care are widely available. This also provides information about potential resources for members as they look to implement ideas within their region. JOPP is available in both online and hard-copy formats and is indexed in the PubMed database, International Pharmaceutical Abstracts as well as other medical literature databases. This ensures that information is available to pharmacists and health-care professionals across the globe and helps provide access to information for those unable to participate in ISOPP symposia.

ISOPP has developed and published Standards of Oncology Pharmacy Practice that provide guidelines for many aspects of oncology pharmacy practice, and take into account the realities of oncology pharmacy practice from both resource-rich and resource-poor settings. These standards address key issues for pharmacists and the health-care team regarding topics important to managing drugs and drug therapy, preparing cancer treatment, and administering chemotherapy/cancer therapies. The ISOPP standards focus on aspects of sterile and safe handling of cancer medications, strategies to optimize safety, such as the appropriate use of personal protective equipment, prevention and management of chemotherapy spills, and optimization of the drug therapy process to minimize and manage medication errors. These standards continue to evolve as the practice of oncology pharmacy and cancer care evolves and are currently being updated. Additionally, many national pharmacy and/or health-care organizations have developed standards that provide additional and complementary guidance on oncology pharmacy practice. ISOPP partners with these groups to help disseminate information to

members throughout the world that may benefit from this work.

The availability of new drugs and drug combinations for the management of cancer, cancer-related complications and treatment-related complications introduces a new challenge of ensuring all members of the cancer care team keep apprised of developments. Educational offerings that focus on the changes in care are provided through live programming, enduring materials on the ISOPP websites, and through editions of the *Journal of Oncology Pharmacy Practice*. ISOPP is committed to providing members with regional and international education opportunities to support both formal and informal networking, ultimately advancing oncology pharmacy practice.

There are emerging issues, advances and challenges in oncology pharmacy and ISOPP provides the opportunity for pharmacists around the world to jointly discuss concerns and consider solutions using ISOPP forums. Many of these challenges involve the clinical application of new treatments and considerations required to prevent, minimize, manage and identify the long- and short-term treatment-related complications.

Examples of topics addressed in ISOPP educational forums include:

- **Cost of cancer care.** The cost of drugs used in treatment of cancer account for a high percentage of medical cost (2). The cost of medications impacts accessibility of treatments for many individuals worldwide. Rising costs have led to theft and diversion of drugs in some areas, resale of drugs on “black markets”, and/or the use of substandard or counterfeit drugs.
- **Oral anticancer drugs.** The evolution of oral anticancer agents in cancer therapy, and the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of these agents, has become an important discussion for the cancer care team. Strategies to optimize care for individuals with cancer on oral or oral/parenteral drug therapy are frequently published in *Journal of Oncology Pharmacy Practice* and/or presented at ISOPP symposia including tools to improve medication adherence, optimization of access to drug therapy, management of drug-drug interactions and cost of care.
- **Oncology drug shortages.** The enduring challenge of

oncology drugs shortages across the world (3) has been addressed by ISOPP and through other oncology pharmacy organizations.

- **Biosimilars and cancer care.** The availability of biosimilar anticancer therapy varies between regions and countries, and sharing ideas and experiences has helped ISOPP members address questions in their local areas.
- **Expanding role of oncology pharmacy and the professional development of pharmacists throughout the world is a current focus for the organization.** Planning is ongoing to determine strategies for ISOPP and/or collaborations with ISOPP to support the development of oncology pharmacy globally.
- **Development of clinical guidelines for optimization of care of the individual affected by cancer, including both treatment and survivorship issues.**
- **Optimization of drug therapy in select patient populations** (e.g. elderly, individuals with organ dysfunction).
- **Patient and caregiver-directed education.**

Since the ability to discuss issues and learn from colleagues from across the world is invaluable, ISOPP encourages the development of evidence-based recommendations through the support of oncology pharmacy research and interdisciplinary research. ISOPP is committed to supporting the efforts of oncology pharmacists in research efforts to help answer the questions in optimizing drug therapy as well as optimizing oncology pharmacy systems. The support of research ultimately leads to a better understanding of practice, and contributes to improvement in patient care.

ISOPP continually seeks opportunities to promote and enhance oncology pharmacy practice worldwide to improve cancer patient care. There are many barriers to providing optimal cancer care to individuals throughout the world. The issues listed above are complex, and the likelihood of success is greater through collaboration. ●

For more information

<http://www.isopp.org>

References

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