NCCN National Comprehensive Cancer Network®

2025 NCCN State Oncology Society Forum

March 29, 2025

National Comprehensive
Cancer Network®

State Oncology Society Forum

Caribe Royale Orlando
Grand Sierra F-H
8101 World Center Drive | Orlando, FL
March 29, 2025; 8:00 AM – 12:15 PM

8:00 – 8:30 AM **Breakfast and Networking**

8:30 – 8:35 AM **Welcome and Introductions**

Sean McCarson, MPA
State Policy Program Manager
National Comprehensive Cancer Network

8:35 – 8:55 AM **NCCN Update**

Crystal S. Denlinger, MD, FACP
Chief Executive Officer
National Comprehensive Cancer Network
Board of Directors
Pennsylvania Society of Oncology & Hematology (PSOH)

8:55 – 10:10 AM **Panel 1: Streamlining the Prior Authorization Process: Optimizing Access to Care Through Patient-Centered Action**

Moderated by:
Angela Ladner, MA
President
National Oncology State Network
Executive Director
Mississippi Oncology Society (MOS)

Cassie Beisel
Senior Manager, Advocacy & Engagement
PAN Foundation

Eric J. Gratias, MD, FAAP
National Physician Executive, Medical Benefit Services
EviCore by Evernorth

Asmita Mishra, MD, MBA
Medical Director of Payer Strategies
H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute
NCCN Products & Services Committee Member

Sucharu Prakash, MD
Medical Director
Texas Oncology - Paris
Immediate Past-President
Texas Society of Clinical Oncology (TxSCO)

10:10 – 10:20 AM **Break**

10:20 – 11:30 AM **Panel 2: State Policy & Legislative Landscape in 2025**

Moderated by:
Alyssa Schatz, MSW
Vice-President of Policy & Advocacy
National Comprehensive Cancer Network

James Lee, MS
Director, State Regulation & Policy
Community Oncology Alliance (COA)

Sean McCarson, MPA
State Policy Program Manager
National Comprehensive Cancer Network

Paresh Patel, MD
Medical Oncology
Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute
Legislative Chairman (State)
Florida Society of Clinical Oncology (FLASCO)

Nicole Tapay, JD
Director, Cancer Care Delivery & Health Policy
Association of Cancer Care Centers (ACCC)

Nick Telesco
State Advocacy Specialist
Association for Clinical Oncology (ASCO)

11:30 AM– 12:00 PM	**Best Practices Presentation**
	Philip Kuriakose, MD, FACP Chief, Section of Hematology *Henry Ford Cancer Institute* President *Michigan Society of Hematology & Oncology (MSHO)*
12:00 – 12:15 PM	**Wrap up & Conclusion**
	Vicki Hood, MPP Manager of Policy & Advocacy *National Comprehensive Cancer Network*

Cassie Beisel

Cassie Beisel is a seasoned advocacy and engagement professional with over a decade of experience in grassroots initiatives, patient and stakeholder engagement, and program development. As a three-time cancer survivor, she is deeply committed to advancing policies that improve healthcare access and quality of care for all individuals living with chronic, rare, and life-threatening conditions.

As Senior Manager for Advocacy and Engagement at the PAN Foundation, Cassie harnesses her personal experience to amplify patient voices and drive impactful change in healthcare access and affordability. She plays a key role in PAN's Center for Patient Research, leading on-demand rapid polling and the annual State of Patient Access Report—critical initiatives that capture real-world patient challenges. These insights directly shape PAN's advocacy efforts, program development, and strategic initiatives, ensuring that the organization's work is informed by patient experiences and rooted in evidence-based solutions.

Previously, Cassie led advocacy efforts at the Melanoma Research Foundation as Senior Advocacy Officer, where she worked to advance policy, secure federal funding, and address regulatory issues affecting the melanoma community. She also served as a steering committee member for the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention and co-chaired the Skin Smart Campus initiative, promoting skin cancer prevention policies and education on U.S. college campuses.

Crystal S. Denlinger, MD, FACP

Crystal S. Denlinger, MD, FACP, is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at the NCCN. She joined NCCN in April 2021 as Senior Vice President, Chief Scientific Officer and was successfully recruited as CEO in 2023, following a national search. Dr. Denlinger oversees all NCCN programs and activities, including maintaining the library of NCCN Guidelines® and advancing global collaborations, new oncology research, peer-reviewed publication, patient information, and cancer policy.

Prior to joining NCCN, Dr. Denlinger held several leadership positions with Fox Chase Cancer Center—an NCCN Member Institution—including Chief, Gastrointestinal Medical Oncology; Deputy Director, Early Drug Development Phase 1 Program; Director, Survivorship Program; and Associate Professor, Department of Hematology/ Oncology. After joining NCCN, she will continue to see patients at Fox Chase Cancer Center in a limited, volunteer capacity.

Dr. Denlinger has been involved with NCCN for many years, including serving as chair of the NCCN Guidelines Panel for Survivorship and serving on a number of panels, including the Esophageal/ Gastric Cancers Panel, the *JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network* Editorial Board, and on various abstract committees and ORP RFP committees, including chairing two committees. She was named an NCCN Young Investigator Awardee in 2012 and received the NCCN Rodger Winn Award in 2018 for exemplifying leadership, drive, and commitment in service to developing clinical practice guidelines.

She graduated from a combined BS/MD program at The College of New Jersey and Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, followed by an internal medicine residency with Mount Sinai Medical Center, and hematology/oncology fellowship at Fox Chase Cancer Center/Temple University Hospital. She has authored hundreds of clinical research articles and abstracts and received awards from organizations that include the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Foundation and the American College of Physicians.

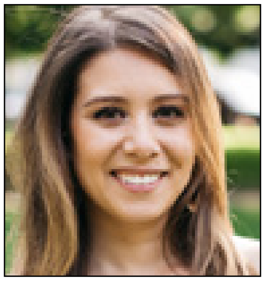
Eric J. Gratias, MD, FAAP

Eric J. Gratias, MD, FAAP, is National Physician Executive, Medical Benefit Services, at EviCore by Evernorth. Dr. Gratias joined EviCore in 2013 and currently serves as National Physician Executive for Medical Benefit Services. He is responsible for the overall clinical performance and quality of the company's medical management solutions and ongoing evolution of the optimal approach to utilization management. He oversees the company's formulation and maintenance of clinical guidelines, utilization and quality management services, clinical compliance and accreditation, and health services research. Dr. Gratias also serves as an executive clinical liaison to EviCore by Evernorth clients, state and federal regulatory entities, and the broader physician community.

Dr. Gratias is a fellowship-trained, continuously board-certified pediatric hematologist/oncologist. Prior to joining EviCore, Dr. Gratias was Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Vice Chair for Research at the University of Tennessee College of Medicine - Chattanooga. He also served as a full-time practicing pediatric hematologist/oncologist at Children's Hospital at Erlanger for nine years and continues to serve as a member of the Renal Tumors Committee of the Children's Oncology Group.

Dr. Gratias received his medical degree from Wake Forest School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He completed his residency in general pediatrics and fellowship in pediatric hematology/oncology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He is an author of over 30 peer-reviewed publications and nearly 40 regional or national meeting abstracts, as well as an accomplished public speaker on a variety of health care topics.

Victoria Hood, MPP



Victoria Hood, MPP, is the Manager of Policy and Advocacy at NCCN. In this role, Ms. Hood is responsible for the oversight and management of NCCN's legislative and regulatory strategies at the federal and state levels. Acting under the Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, she serves as a point of contact for legislators and regulators, manages NCCN's engagement on policy issues relevant to the organization's mission, and oversees planning and execution of the NCCN Policy Summit Series.

Ms. Hood initially joined NCCN in 2022 as the State Policy Specialist where she oversaw NCCN's state legislative and regulatory strategy on behalf of the Oncology Policy Program.

Prior to joining NCCN, Ms. Hood spent almost a decade serving in various legislative and political roles in Philadelphia and Montgomery County in Pennsylvania. From 2018-2022 she was the Chief of Staff for a member serving in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. She has also held positions as both a senior political staffer and congressional aide to U.S. Congressman Brendan Boyle. Ms. Hood received a Master of Public Policy from Temple University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Drexel University.

Philip Kuriakose, MD

Dr. Kuriakose obtained his medical degree from Christian Medical College/Panjab University in India, and after completing residencies in Internal Medicine in India and at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, MI, he pursued a fellowship in Hematology/Oncology from the Mayo Clinic, following which he joined on faculty in the division of Hematology/Oncology at Henry Ford Cancer/Henry Ford Health. His clinical and research interests in Malignant Hematology are in the areas of Lymphoid and Plasma Cell Disorders, where he is involved in overseeing both early phase and late-stage clinical trials, while his focus in Classical Hematology is in Disorders of Hemostasis & Thrombosis, where he leads the Hemophilia Treatment Center. He is currently Chief of the section of Hematology at Henry Ford Cancer, and Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Internal Medicine at Wayne State University. He's been an active member of MSHO, having served on it's board since 2018, and is currently the President of the Society.

Angela Ladner, MA

Angela Abraham Ladner is a native of Vicksburg, MS. She graduated from the University of Mississippi with a BA in English/Journalism and a MA in Journalism with a Political Science minor. She became the Executive Director of The Mississippi Psychiatric Association and has served in a dual role as their Executive Director and lobbyist for the last 25 years, while handling the day-to-day operations of the association. She is an individual contractor with Next Wave Group of Maryland and serves as Exec Director/lobbyist for The Mississippi Oncology Society since 2018. She is also the Exec Director for the Society of Gynecologic Nurse Oncologists, the Senior Psychiatrists and the Alliance Health Education Initiative (AHEI). She serves as NWG Director of Special Projects. In addition, she is a contractor for the Mississippi Public Health Institute on the OD2A grant for opioid use disorder.

Ladner is the 2025-2027 President of the National Oncology State Network (NOSN). She is an elected Rep to the ASCO State Affiliate Council from 2024-2027. Ladner served on the MS Dept. of Insurance's Mental Health Parity Advisory Board, the Mental Health Task Force appointed by former MS Attorney General, Jim Hood, served on the Advisory Cte for the HOPE Pathways Committee, in collaboration with the Mississippi Supreme Court and as a Co-Chair of the Opportunities for Treatment Committee affiliated with HOPE Rising.

Ladner was named by the Mississippi Business Journal as one of the Top 50 Leading Businesswomen in Mississippi in 2012. She was the only non-physician member to serve on the

American Medical Association Council on Legislation from 2006-2007, the group that determines the policy and legislative agenda for the AMA. In October 2006, she was presented with the "Lighthouse Award" from the Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence, their highest distinction.

Angela served as President of the Central Medical Society Alliance in 2001, served as Mississippi State Medical Association Alliance President, 2005-2006 and was the 2006-2007-Chairman of the American Medical Association Alliance Legislative Committee. The Mississippi State Medical Association Alliance chose Angela as their Most Outstanding Alliance Member of the Year, 2009-2010 and received the MSMA President's Award for Legislative Advocacy in 2018-2019. She has served as Treasurer for her county alliance for many years. Angela is the longest serving member of the MSMA Council on Legislation from 2007 to present.

In the summer of 2010, she was presented with a LEAP Award from the American Medical Association Alliance for outstanding achievement in legislative advocacy and education for her involvement with the "Fit 4 Change" Legislative Fitness Challenge conducted at the MS Capitol.

Her consulting business, Changing History Promotions, LLC., was formed from her partnership and management of Patrick House, Season 10 Winner of NBC's The Biggest Loser, from working together 2010 until 2013. In the summer of 2012, Ladner was presented with a HAP Award from the American Medical Association Alliance for the LEAN ON ME childhood obesity and anti-bullying program (Learn, Educate, Advocate, Nullify, Obesity Now in My Educational system) which she developed for House, to help elementary school-aged children make healthier choices regarding nutrition and exercise. The program reached over 50,000 students across the US & was featured in an episode of The Biggest Loser, Season 12.

Ladner is the 2024-2025 President of the Jackson Symphony League, the fundraising arm of the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra. She is a graduate of Leadership Madison County, served as the Centennial Chairman for the City of Ridgeland and has performed countless volunteer services and fundraising for numerous non-profit organizations. She received the 1999 Most Outstanding Community Service Award from the Jackson Area Alumnae Panhellenic Association and the President's Award in 2000 from the Madison County Chamber of Commerce. She has been a member of the Junior League of Jackson, the Cancer League, and the Mississippi Symphony League. She is an active member of the University of Mississippi Alumni Association, Past President of the Saint Joseph Catholic School Parent Association, Past President of the Jackson Area Alumnae Panhellenic Association, Member of Jackson Women for Good and Past Chairman of the Sesquicentennial Celebration at St. Joseph Catholic School in Madison, MS.

Changing History Promotions has now evolved to include consultation for PR, social media, marketing, branding, government, and media relations as well as business policy, procedures, and operational structure. Ladner's client was named the Small Business of the Year in 2016 by the Vicksburg/Warren County Chamber of Commerce. In 2017, Ladner was instrumental in helping one of her clients be featured on The Travel Channel's Bizarre Foods: Delicious Destinations with Andrew Zimmerman and The Inspiration Channel's State Plate hosted by Taylor Hicks of American Idol fame.

Angela and her husband Mark, a Psychiatrist (Chairman of the Dept of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at the University of Mississippi Medical Center), along with their 22-year-old triplet daughters reside in Jackson, MS.

James Lee, MS

James Lee, MS, is the Director of State Regulation and Policy at the Community Oncology Alliance (COA). In his role, James established and oversees the organization's state policy program that aims to empower practice leaders to engage in state-level advocacy. Under his leadership, COA members have successfully opposed policies that threaten patient care, built impactful interstate policy collaborations, and advanced key legislation in state legislatures nationwide.

Prior to joining COA, James served as a government relations manager for one of the nation's largest 340B Federally Qualified Health Center systems in Southeast Texas. In that role, he led strategic legislative campaigns and served as a liaison between a network of over forty-five facilities serving 190,000 clients and more than seventy-five federal, state, and local policymakers.

Originally from Texas, James obtained a bachelor's degree in political science at the University of Houston and is currently pursuing a master's degree in health law and strategy at New York University. James currently resides in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Sean T. McCarson, MPA

Sean T. McCarson, MPA is NCCN State Policy Program Manager at NCCN. Sean joined NCCN in 2022 when the State Policy Program became a permanent fixture within the Policy & Advocacy Team. He is responsible for overseeing NCCN's state legislative and regulatory strategy on behalf of the Oncology Policy Program. Sean maintains a comprehensive understanding of the oncology policy landscape across the United States, manages strategic partnerships with state organizations and agencies of interest, and develops messaging, materials, and events that contribute to the overall development and advancement of NCCN's policy agenda at the state level. Under the purview of the State Policy Program Manager is the NCCN State Oncology Society Forum (SOSF). State oncology societies offer crucial insights into ways in which NCCN can continue collaboration to ensure access to high-quality, high-value, patient-centered guideline-concordant care.

Sean has experience in government relations and legislative affairs having served in the Pennsylvania House & Senate. He held roles such as Legislative Director and Executive Director of Policy. On behalf of NCCN, Sean also assists in the planning and implementation of the NCCN Oncology Policy Summit Series. Moreover, he has taken a particular interest in closing care gaps and was published in the Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (JNCCN) for his work on the Policy Summit entitled Cancer Across Geography which looked at disparities in cancer care across the US.

Sean earned his Bachelor of Arts in International Relations/Political Science from West Chester University. He returned to West Chester University to complete a Master of Public Administration.

Asmita Mishra, MD, MBA

Asmita Mishra, MD, MBA is a Senior Member in the Department of Blood and Marrow Transplantation and Cellular Immunotherapy at the Moffitt Cancer Center. She is a national expert in cellular immunotherapies and provides curative intent treatment using allogeneic hematopoietic stem cells for the treatment of high-risk leukemias. She has spent over a decade as a hematologist/oncologist, providing impactful, translational, and cutting-edge science to change people's lives. Through innovation, perseverance, and strong clinical acumen, she has led numerous multi-institutional national and international clinical trials, received extramural grant funding, and published manuscripts in well-recognized, peer-reviewed medical journals in highly recognized journals including the Journal of Clinical Oncology, Blood, Blood Advances, and Haematologica.

In addition to her substantial clinical expertise and academic efforts, Dr. Mishra is a sought-after and recognized leader in her institution. She is currently the Medical Director of Payer Strategies. In this role, she is responsible for leading the strategic operations for medical care and provider-payer relationships in collaboration with Moffitt's Payer Strategies team and the Moffitt Medical Group. The primary purpose of this role is to translate the value of Moffitt's health care delivery services into effective managed care and alternative payment model strategies, contracts, and successful relationships with customer stakeholders, including Moffitt members, Moffitt leadership, payers and insurers, employers, and other partners. She is a key leader in the resolution of payer issues related to patient care, contracts, and reimbursement driven by payer policy. Within this role, she has already represented Moffitt regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Dr Mishra holds a BA in psychology from New York University, a doctorate in medicine from St. George's University, and an MBA from the executive program at the University of South Florida.

Paresh Patel, MD

Dr. Paresh Patel has been a dedicated member of the Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute since 2012, currently practicing in Tallahassee. He is quadruple board-certified in Medical Oncology, Hematology, Hospice and Palliative Care, and Internal Medicine. His expertise spans a wide range of patient care, focusing on providing comprehensive cancer treatment and compassionate end-of-life care.

Beyond his clinical responsibilities, Dr. Patel is a strong advocate for cancer patients and the medical community. Since 2016, he has served as the Legislative Chair for the Florida Society of Clinical Oncology, where he works to influence healthcare policies that benefit cancer patients and healthcare providers. He is also an active member of the Executive Board and Political Action Committee for the Florida Medical Association, contributing to initiatives that promote the well-being of both patients and medical professionals.

In addition to his advocacy work, Dr. Patel has been deeply involved in his local community. He has held several leadership roles, including serving as Past President and member of the Executive Board of the Capital Medical Society, which represents three counties in the Panhandle area. His leadership has helped shape healthcare delivery and policy within the region.

Dr. Patel earned his medical degree from B.J. Medical School in Amdavad, India. He completed his residency in Internal Medicine at Jersey Shore Medical Center in Neptune, New Jersey, where he also served as Chief Resident. Following his residency, he worked as an academic hospitalist and assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University before pursuing specialized fellowships in Hospice and Palliative Care, as well as Hematology and Oncology.

Dr. Patel's commitment to patient care, advocacy, and education has made him a respected figure in the medical community. His dedication to advancing cancer treatment and supporting his patients continues to have a lasting impact on both his peers and the communities he serves.

Sucharu Chris Prakash, MD

Dr. Sucharu Chris Prakash is the Medical Director and an Oncology/Hematology specialist at Texas Oncology– Paris. As the Director of Quality Services and Chair of Texas Oncology Quality Committee, he strives to maintain the highest standards of oncology care across the statewide group. Of note, he led Texas Oncology's Precision Medicine Testing Initiative to increase biomarker testing in Cancer, and as a result Texas Oncology now tests almost 100% of eligible cancer patients. He is a member of the ASCO Task Force for rural cancer care and has spoken on this matter at various forums. He also moderates a biannual Oncology Congress designed to improve education and awareness among rural oncology providers. As the President of Texas Society of Clinical Oncology, he contributed to increased membership, active advocacy and educational activities for its provider members. As past member of the TMA's Committee on Cancer, he was involved in cancer policy and coverage issues impacting providers and patients in Texas. As a Principal Investigator for US Oncology Research, he has brought clinical trials to the patients living in rural communities of Northeast Texas.

Alyssa Schatz, MSW

Alyssa Schatz, MSW, serves as the Vice President of Policy and Advocacy for NCCN, a not-for-profit alliance of 33 leading academic cancer centers working to improve and facilitate quality, effective, equitable, and accessible cancer care. At NCCN, Ms. Schatz is responsible for oversight of the Policy and Advocacy Department and is a primary point of contact for policymakers and regulators. The Policy and Advocacy team works to advance NCCN's mission in health policy realms through policy engagement at the state and federal levels, stakeholder engagement, and strategic partnerships.

Prior to joining NCCN, Ms. Schatz spent more than a decade in behavioral health and disability rights advocacy, most recently serving as Vice President of Advocacy and Policy at Mental Health Partnerships and as Associate Director of the Alliance of Community Service Providers. Ms. Schatz was involved in securing Medicaid expansion in Pennsylvania and advocating for the implementation of behavioral health parity rights.

Ms. Schatz received a Master of Social Work with a concentration in Macro Practice from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice and a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from the Eastern Connecticut State University School of Social Work. Ms. Schatz is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Public Health at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health.

Nicole Tapay, JD

Nicole Tapay, JD, is the Director, Cancer Care Delivery & Health Policy for the Association of Cancer Care Centers (ACCC). In this role, she is responsible for developing and executing ACCC's health policy and advocacy strategy. She serves as a liaison between ACCC's members and external stakeholders, including patient advocacy organizations, policy experts, and governmental agencies and officials to advance the policy objectives and priorities of ACCC's interdisciplinary membership.

Ms. Tapay has over twenty-five years of health policy experience and has held senior health policy, legislative, and regulatory roles in the government, non-profit, and private sectors. Nicole obtained her A.B. from Princeton University and her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.

Nick Telesco

Nick Telesco works as a Specialist, State Advocacy at the Association for Clinical Oncology (ASCO), where he works with ASCO's 47 state and regional affiliates to advance advocacy priorities impacting cancer care at the state level. Nick's work focuses on reforming practices by insurers and pharmacy benefit mangers that can limit patient access, including but not limited to co-pay accumulators, mandatory white bagging and brown bagging policies, patient steering, and non-medical switching of medications. Nick graduated from James Madison University with a degree in Public Policy Administration. In his free time, Nick enjoys going to museums, attending concerts, reading, and traveling.

Upcoming Events

View the online calendar at NCCN.org/events.

Oncology Policy Summit

Tuesday, May 6, 2025

Join us in Washington, D.C. or Virtually

Primary Care and Oncology Collaboration for Better Patient Outcomes

Register Now: **NCCN.org/summits**

NCCN 2025 Annual Congress: Hematologic Malignancies™

Friday, October 10 – Saturday, October 11, 2025
New location!
Hilton San Diego Bayfront, San Diego, CA

NCCN 2026 Nursing Program: Advancing Oncology Nursing™

Thursday, March 26, 2026
Caribe Royale Orlando, Orlando, FL

NCCN 2026 Annual Conference

Friday, March 27 – Sunday, March 29, 2026
Caribe Royale Orlando, Orlando, FL

2024 State Oncology Society Forum

Thirteenth Annual State Oncology Society Forum

Summary Update

Sean T. McCarson, MPA, State Policy Program Manager, NCCN

On behalf of the entire Policy & Advocacy Team at NCCN, we were delighted to hold the Thirteenth Annual State Oncology Society Forum (SOSF) at Annual Conference. The event was held on Sunday, April 7, 2024. A coalition of executive directors, presidents, board members, and providers of engaged state societies attended the SOSF in representation of 40 states. Attendance at the forum was healthy and led to a robust conversation on important topics impacting the oncology landscape. Previous meetings and surveys of the various societies helped to inform the programming for the 2024 event.

Instead of hosting a Keynote speaker this year, NCCN opted to provide a more comprehensive policy update from our new CEO Dr. Crystal Denlinger. Dr. Denlinger also serves on the Board of Directors for the Pennsylvania Society of Oncology & Hematology (PSOH).

We convened panels of nationally recognized experts to engage in thoughtful discussion on topics important to this audience. The first panel focused on Innovative Strategies to Improve Prior Authorization. Challenges and opportunities to enhance the patient experience and reduce provider administrative burden were examined in detail.

The next panel delved into Advancing Access in Underserved & Rural Areas. This is a continuation from the NCCN Policy Summit we convened in June of 2023 entitled Cancer Across Geography which resulted in a subsequent *JNCCN* publication. Many of our societies are concentrated in rural America and must navigate unique challenges for their patient populations; moreover, many societies must also consider equitable access to care and representation for native and Indigenous people.

Interactive time between the state societies and NCCN occurred after the break and is probably the most crucial piece of the day. Attendees from the various state societies participated in round table discussions where they were able to discuss in depth their policy wins, challenges, and the potential for collaboration on shared priorities. As usual, many of the societies shared their work on prior-authorization reform, clinical trial diversity and access, step therapy reform, PBM reform, non-medical switching, drug repository programs, telemedicine, fertility preservation, and Medicaid to name a few. Furthermore, there was a strong focus this year from societies on state prescription drug affordability boards (PDABs), co-pay accumulators and maximizers, and the impact that alternative funding programs have on patient access and care.

Welcome and Introductions

Sean T. McCarson, MPA, State Policy Program Manager, NCCN, welcomed attendees, thanked sponsors, and reviewed the agenda for the State Oncology Society Forum.

NCCN Policy Update

Crystal Denlinger, MD, FACP, CEO, NCCN provided this policy update. Dr. Denlinger provided a broad array of updates within the organization before delving into our federal and state policy engagement.

Through the work of our Policy & Advocacy Department, NCCN has been able to grow our federal legislative, regulatory and administrative engagement. NCCN has worked with the White House, CMS, NCI, and Congress as well as other oncology nonprofits and partners to advocate for short- and long-term fixes to the ongoing drug shortage crisis which as we all know, has hit the oncology field particularly hard. NCCN has partnered with other members of Congress and coalition partners in promoting the Reducing Hereditary Cancer Act, among a variety of other federal pieces of legislation.

NCCN has engaged with CMS and the FDA on issues such as Patient Navigation, SDOH screening, the Enhancing Oncology Model, and decentralized trials. Our engagement also includes responding to regulatory requests, and for 2023 NCCN submitted 31 comment letters.

NCCN is increasingly engaging with Medicare Administrative Contractors who are using our content more frequently, which has resulted in NCCN responding to numerous Proposed Local Coverage Determinations for various MACs to ensure coverage determinations align with NCCN Guidelines®.

NCCN also continues to focus on state advocacy efforts across the country. We recognize. that we are much stronger on issue advocacy when we work in partnership with a broad and diverse group of stakeholders to enact meaningful reforms. Therefore, our State Policy Program is proud to join coalitions throughout the country who share our goals. The State Policy Program has focused on the successful passage of (currently 20 states) laws advancing access to biomarker testing. As this program continues to mature, other areas of focus are continuing to unfold, including additional engagements in screening/prevention, statutory passage of NCCN Guidelines® into law when appropriate, fertility preservation, access to hereditary cancer screening, and implementation monitoring of the new biomarker laws.

While the Policy & Advocacy department engages extensively at the federal and state levels, NCCN also engages in systems transformation work in the equity space. NCCN recognizes that our mission can only be achieved when all patients can access optimal cancer care. Unfortunately, dramatic inequities exist across our health and social systems, as well as disparities across race, ethnicity, geography, and income, and we know that the root causes of such inequities are multifactorial. Therefore, NCCN partnered with the National Minority Quality Forum and the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network to launch the Elevating Cancer Equity initiative (ECE).

This initiative aims to address inequities in cancer care, first through the convening of a national working group of experts, and then through the implementation of working group recommendations. The resulting initiatives include the Alliance for Cancer Care Equity (ACCE), a coalition of professional societies, patient advocates, and community-based organizations striving to advance more equitable care systems through federal policy change, and the piloting of the Health Equity Report Card, or the HERC.

The HERC is a tool intended to measure 19 equitable care practices across four domains (Community engagement, accessibility of care and SDOH, addressing bias in care delivery, and quality and comprehensiveness of care). The HERC is currently being piloted in 5 academic settings and is scheduled to launch in community settings in 2024.

Panel 1: Innovative Strategies to Improve Prior Authorization

Moderated by: Alyssa Schatz, MSW, Vice-President, Policy & Advocacy, NCCN

Panelists included:

- **Matthew Jenusaitis, MSE, MBA,** Chief Administrative Officer for Oncology & Radiation Therapy, UC San Diego Health & Moores Cancer Center
- **Asmita Mishra, MD, MBA,** Medical Director of Payer Strategies, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute, NCCN Products & Services Committee
- **Stephen Schleicher, MD, MBA,** Chief Medical Officer, Tennessee Oncology
- **Daneen Sekoni, MHSA,** Vice-President, Policy & Advocacy, Cancer Support Community

The prior authorization process with the payer community can be challenging to navigate, cause unnecessary delays in treatment, and additional administrative burden on providers.

Daneen Sekoni affirmed these challenges by recognizing that the patients they represent face two pain points: financial toxicity and delays in access to care. Cancer Support Community recognizes that about half of cancer patients will experience financial toxicity at some point (including into survivorship); moreover, they could be 3-5 times more likely to delay or postpone care and see an increase in adjusted mortality risk and reduction in positive treatment outcomes.

As a Medical Director, Dr. Schleicher brought up the importance of biosimilar policy, biosimilar parity, and understanding the unique operational challenges of practices of all sizes.

Dr. Mishra discussed the importance of site of care steerage and the impact it has on the patient's experience. The policy landscape includes providers who are directing care, payers who are trying to guide patients into certain treatment options, and manufacturers who want to prioritize their products. These competing interests, according to Dr. Jenusaitis, make the policy landscape extremely problematic. Naturally, the conversation segued into policies impacting patient access such a white bagging, brown bagging, clear bagging, and even gold bagging.

Gold carding has been a potential approach to cut through some of the prior auth burden. However, this is not the silver bullet that many had hoped for because it also creates a burden on the payer side. Frustration from providers also comes in the form of working on both agreed upon pathway adherence and prior authorization navigation.

The topic of artificial intelligence and the unique opportunities and challenges it could pose on streamlining the prior auth process was also discussed by the panel. For those in the patient community, they believe there needs to be recognition of existing health disparities in the healthcare system and the potential role that AI could play in exacerbating existing health inequalities and in turn lead to greater patient medical mistrust.

Panelists agreed that there needs to be a very transparent and methodical approach to adopting AI technologies into these platforms. Panelists discussed the importance of shortening approval times and having human interaction, at least, during the patient's appeal process.

Prior authorization, step therapy reform, and non-medical switching have historically been areas of concern for our state societies. The audience was highly engaged during the Q&A portion of our panel.

Panel 2: Advancing Access in Underserved & Rural Areas

Moderated by: Sean McCarson, MPA, State Policy Program Manager, NCCN

Panelists included:

- **Arun Krishna, PhD,** Vice-President, US Franchise Head & Lung Cancer, AstraZeneca
- **Quan Ly, MD, Professor,** Department of Surgery, Complex General Surgical Oncology, Fred & Pamela Buffet Cancer Center
- **Emily Nenon, MPA,** State Director of Alaska, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)
- **José Rivera, MBA,** Chief Administrative Quality Officer, MD Anderson Cancer Center
- **Elisa Rodriguez, PhD, MS,** Vice-President & Associate Director of DEI: Cancer Support Grant, Director of Community Engagement Resource, Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center.

While NCCN's membership is comprised of academic cancer centers, we recognize the importance of advocating for policies that promote equitable access to care across geography, and the essential role that community practices play in providing such care. That is why it has been so important to work with state oncology societies and community oncology providers to continue these conversations. NCCN has focused on the interplay between geography and patient access to the full continuum of care from screening through survivorship. The conversation on screening resources was prominently featured on the panel. Dr. Krishna discussed the importance of lung cancer screening because the U.S. has some of the lowest screening rates. AstraZeneca understands some of these geographic challenges and focuses on education and processes to improve screening uptake. Mobile lung and mammography screening units have seen successful adoption in underserved areas. As it relates to the conversation on patient education, building the bi-directional trust between communities and providers is paramount to breaking through misinformation. Mr. Rivera discussed closing the information loop with patients who interact with some of these outreach and tertiary services.

Panelists also discussed reducing barriers to screening by removing reimbursement barriers for certain telehealth services and streamlining interoperability of clinical trial participation. Clinical trial design needs to evolve to become inclusive and supportive of broader participation; especially as it relates to clinical trial diversity for a more representative sample of the American populace. Allowing telehealth services throughout the clinical trial experience could significantly reduce the cost of transportation and the time spent traveling for the patient, which could result in reducing significant barriers of access and reaching a greater number of potential enrollees.

Emily Nenon brought to the audience's attention the high rates of colorectal cancer in the Alaskan Native population, which is the highest of any population group in the world. This helped move the conversation into understanding cost burdens faced by minority and Indigenous communities. Mr. Rivera represents MD Anderson in a state which has not expanded Medicaid. He affirmed the support of MD Anderson to use its resources to connect patients with the most appropriate care with providers if the patient is underinsured or lacks insurance. This is much easier with formal patient navigation to connect individuals with foundations and other forms of financial support.

Dr. Rodriguez, who has engaged with some of her community partners for over 10 years, recognizes how these organizations have gained the trust of the communities they represent and the essential role they can play in advocating on behalf of patients in their communities. She noted that it may not always be a clinician who helps guide or inform a patient about their care- whether it's for screening or treatment, and that it might be a trusted community organization that they would prefer help navigate them through their care journey Acknowledging the need for cultural competency is also important to understanding and developing trust with individuals and communities.

We appreciate our panelists for discussing innovative approaches and best practices that can be replicated to bridge gaps in patient access and care. Such examples that were mentioned throughout the conversation included: Expanded use of technology, such as rural broadband and adoption of more friendly telehealth reimbursement policies, enhanced transportation access, and comprehensive screening for health-related social needs. These are just a few additional ways to close gaps in access.

NCCN remains committed to combating geographic care imbalances and we maintain that where you live should not determine whether you live.

Wrap up and Conclusion

Victoria Hood, MPP, Manager, Policy & Advocacy, NCCN offered the closing remarks for the day to the society and again thanking our supporters who make it possible for us to host this program in Orlando. Vicki also informed the audience of additional upcoming programing and policy summits from the NCCN Policy & Advocacy Team.

About the State Oncology Society Forum

In recognition of the essential role of community oncologists and their representative state oncology societies in advancing the quality of cancer care, NCCN provides an annual forum for open dialogue, an exchange of best practices, and the identification of areas for collaboration. Fundamental to the success of this program are the shared core values of the state oncology societies and NCCN, which is to improve the lives of patients with cancer.

NCCN provides state oncology societies with access to NCCN Content and reports on updates therein. The State Oncology Society Forum meets with NCCN at quarterly intervals virtually to discuss the regulatory and legislative landscape. The NCCN State Policy Specialist also regularly meets with and engages with societies directly on shared priorities. The next annual forum will be held in conjunction with the NCCN Annual Conference in March 2025.

For more information about the NCCN State Oncology Society Forum, visit NCCN.org or contact Sean McCarson at McCarson@nccn.org.