

The Importance of Professional Communities and Collaborations

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Picture this scenario. You are a provider who began a job in hematology at an outpatient community practice. A generally healthy 56-year-old patient with no past medical history of illness presents to you with complaints of bruising. They have not seen a provider in 15 years. You order appropriate testing (complete blood count, blood smear, platelet antibodies, and bone marrow biopsy) and diagnose the patient with immune thrombocytopenia purpura (ITP). You initiate corticosteroid therapy and then obtain follow-up labs. Then, 1 week later, the patient presents with excessive urination and complaints of thirst. A chemistry panel shows a blood glucose of 386 mg/dL (range 99–125 mg/dL). You diagnose them with steroid-induced hyperglycemia. They do not have a primary care provider (PCP), but a local office can arrange a new patient visit in 6 days. You call a local endocrinology practice, and they can schedule a consult 10 days from now.

Because you do not feel comfortable sending the patient home with such a high blood glucose level, you research the American Diabetes Association guidelines and suggestions for oral hypoglycemic agents (OHAs), which might have the potential to im-

prove glycemic control in your patient (ADA, 2022). Sure, many of us have collaborating physicians we can curbside, but these and other peers may not always be available to answer questions or provide suggestions. In this situation, wouldn't it be nice to have a PCP or endocrinology advanced practitioner colleague you can ask for their opinion on what to do, or to refer and manage this patient's new condition? Unfortunately, you do not have these connections. Therefore, you do your best to educate the patient on an appropriate diet, the importance of exercise, and glucose monitoring. You prescribe an OHA with diabetic supplies and hope you appropriately managed their care while the patient waits to establish with a PCP.

Does this scenario sound somewhat familiar? Whether you are a new advanced practitioner or established in your practice, forming professional collaborations in your workplace and beyond can be daunting, but it is an important aspect of optimal patient care. Over the years, I have found strategies, such as expanding my professional circle and networking, to be helpful. These connections enhance collaboration with your peers and can benefit patient care.

EXPAND YOUR PROFESSIONAL CIRCLE

As demonstrated in this scenario, advanced practitioners often must fill numerous roles. Whether you are an advanced practitioner new to clinical practice or a seasoned advanced practitioner in a new role, it is important to establish contacts relevant to your practice in your workplace.

For example, you may work in oncology but manage patients who receive EGFR drugs and develop a rash. A first step to expanding your professional circle would be to ask a colleague in your area who a good contact in dermatology may be, in case you need a referral or have any questions. The connection may also begin with a mutual patient. Reach out to that provider and introduce yourself through messaging, email, or by phone. Once a connection is established, ask the provider for the best way to communicate in the future if you have a clinical question or need help getting the patient in to be seen. In addition, let them know you are willing to reciprocate and be available for oncology curbside consults!

NETWORK WITH COLLEAGUES

Professional networking occurs when you actively seek connections within your area to pursue your professional goals and share mutual interests. While interacting with others can seem overwhelming when you are new to your area, try to start by attending grand rounds within your facility and introducing yourself to others.

For example, I manage patients with multiple myeloma and amyloidosis. I regularly attend relevant nephrology grand rounds, as chronic kidney disease affects my patient population. Learning clinical pearls from specialists through grand rounds and sitting next to advanced practitioners in meetings has allowed me to gain confidence in managing kidney-related conditions and build valuable relationships with other providers.

JOIN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In the past, I would read journal articles with authors from various institutions and wonder, “How did these authors meet, then decide to write a paper?” Once I became involved with professional organizations such as the Advanced Practitioner Society for Hematology and Oncology (APSHO), I realized it was easy to network and meet new peo-

ple with similar interests. APSHO provides educational and networking opportunities through live and virtual events, a mentorship program, and forums and blogs on its website.

Have you visited the APSHO Online Community yet? Recently, there has been a flurry of activity discussing clinical practice topics such as an advanced practitioner-led bone marrow transplant, bone health, and genetic/high risk clinics. In the forum, you have access to these and other discussions, blogs, events, and resources that members are posting about in oncology and hematology that might interest you at community.aphso.org/home.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, you can learn about important research such as the development and implementation of an advanced practitioner-led supportive and palliative oncology care program, as well as take a deep dive into distress and support group participation in caregivers of older allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplant patients. Get practical recommendations for managing adverse events associated with tisotumab vedotin for cervical cancer or for teclistamab for relapsed/refractory multiple myeloma. We all know the benefits of being active; an article in this issue summarizes findings on physical activity in patients with multiple myeloma. Learn about diagnosing carcinoma ex pleomorphic adenoma and—speaking of collaboration—review a case study demonstrating an intersection of hematology and rheumatology.

The complexity of cancer care requires unique skill sets that must be cultivated. Collaborating with professionals specializing in different areas ensures comprehensive and patient-centered care. A multidisciplinary approach can lead to a better understanding of a patients’ needs, better outcomes, and more effective treatment plans. Every discipline has a unique perspective and expertise to contribute. Hopefully you will find trusted peers and form connections in your area to help you practice at the top of your scope and enhance patient care. ●

Reference

American Diabetes Association. (2022). Standards of Care in Diabetes-2023 Abridged for Primary Care Providers. *Clinical Diabetes*, 41(1), 4–31. <https://doi.org/10.2337/cd23-as01>