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Cancer Care Experts, Physicians, Patient Advocates, Lawmakers Gather on Capitol Hill to Discuss the Value of Radiation Oncology

Representatives Sue Myrick (R-NC) and Lois Capps (D-CA) take part in briefing to raise awareness about the important role of radiation therapy in cancer treatment

Washington, DC—Leaders from the radiation oncology community – representing patients, physicians, providers, and manufacturers – met on Capitol Hill today to educate lawmakers and their staffs about the latest in radiation therapy technologies and techniques, improvements in patient care and the community’s focus on patient safety in radiation therapy delivery. Representatives Sue Myrick (R-NC) and Lois Capps (D-CA) participated in today’s briefing to share their personal experiences with cancer care and underscore the importance of this vital health care tool in our nation’s continued fight against cancer.

“As a cancer survivor myself who has undergone radiation therapy, I can personally attest to the value of this cancer treatment,” Rep. Myrick said. “Radiation therapy technology has become more precise and state of the art compared to just a decade ago. It is important that cancer patients have access to this critical therapy. It allowed me to continue my normal routine while undergoing treatment. I credit my speedy recovery in large part to radiation therapy, and the caring expertise of my doctors.”

“I applaud this community for coming together to raise awareness about the benefits of advanced radiation therapy services in cancer care,” added Rep. Capps. “As a nurse, I remain committed to working with the medical community, and my fellow lawmakers, to build on the important protections for individuals with cancer in the Affordable Care Act and protect access to potentially life-saving treatments upon which so many patients depend.”

Despite being a highly effective treatment, radiation oncology is one of the least understood cancer therapies by the public, physicians, and policymakers, and it is often confused with diagnostic imaging. Radiation therapy works by damaging the DNA in cancer cells so they cannot repair or reproduce, while simultaneously protecting healthy cells. A patient’s medical team may use radiation oncology to destroy cancer, to control the growth of the cancer, or to relieve pain and other cancer symptoms.

“Radiation therapy has saved millions of lives across our country and is helping Americans fight cancer as one of the three most commonly used cancer treatments along with surgery and chemotherapy,” said Dr. Constantine Mantz, a radiation oncologist with 21st Century Oncology speaking on behalf of the Radiation Therapy Alliance (RTA). “Today, approximately 50- 60 percent of cancer patients are treated with radiation at some time during their course of care. Through new technology and improved techniques, we can use medical radiation to better target disease to more effectively fight cancer.”

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Organizations participating in the event collectively called for passage of the Consistency, Accuracy, Responsibility and Excellence (CARE) in Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy Act, which will soon be introduced by Rep. Ed Whitfield (R-KY), as a positive policy solution to ensuring patient safety through the establishment of national educational and certification standards for health care professionals and radiologic personnel who administer radiation therapy treatments. Supporters of the CARE Act emphasized that this legislation is a necessary first step in improving patient care and protecting patients from unnecessary exposure to radiation.

Dr. Anthony L. Zietman, chair of the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) spoke on behalf of the profession to express its commitment to improving patient safety and reducing the risk of medical errors in radiation oncology, specifically referencing ASTRO's Target Safely Patient Protection Plan, which calls for a national error-reporting database, immediate passage of the CARE Act, facility accreditation, and enhanced education for medical professionals. "The radiation oncology community's highest priority is ensuring that patients receive the safest, most effective treatments available," Zietman said.

"Radiation therapy has become much more complex, both in technology and procedures. We are able to better control the shape and location of the radiation dose," added Dr. Gary Ezzell, president-elect of the American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM). "AAPM supports efforts to further improve these potentially life-saving therapies for patients."

"It is vital for everyone here today—members of Congress, patient advocates, and all members of the cancer community—to work together to continue to fight the war on cancer, to continue the pursuit of innovative treatments that hold even greater promise for a cure, and to ensure that each patient diagnosed with cancer has access to the treatment prescribed by their physician to manage their disease," added Nancy Davenport-Ennis, founder and CEO of Patient Advocate Foundation and the National Patient Advocate Foundation. Davenport-Ennis spoke as both a patient advocate and a cancer survivor as she discussed the importance of access to cancer care for all patients battling this devastating disease.

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