Oncologists' Experiences and Attitudes About Their Role in Philanthropy and Soliciting Donations From Grateful Patients

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PURPOSE: Physician participation in philanthropy is important to marshal resources that allow hospitals to pursue their missions, but little is known about how physicians participate and their attitudes toward participation.

METHODS: To characterize philanthropic roles physicians play and their attitudes about participation and its ethical acceptability, medical oncologists affiliated with the 40 National Cancer Institute–designated comprehensive cancer centers were randomly sampled and surveyed to evaluate experiences and attitudes regarding participation in philanthropy at their institutions. Responses were tabulated; significant associations by physicians' characteristics were explored.

RESULTS: A total of 405 (52%) physicians responded; 62% were men, and 72% were white. Most (71%) had been exposed to their institution's fundraising/development staff; 48% of those were taught how to identify patients who would be good donors; 26% received information about ethical guidelines for soliciting donations from their patients; 21% were taught how their institution ensures Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act compliance. A third (32%) of respondents had been asked to directly solicit a donation from their patients for their institution, of whom half declined to do so. Those who had solicited from their patients had been in practice significantly longer (mean, 19 v 13 years; $P < .001$). A substantial minority (37%) felt comfortable talking to their patients about donation (men more than women, 43% v 26%; $P = .008$); however, 74% agreed it could interfere with the physician-patient relationship, and 52% believe conflict of interest exists.

CONCLUSION: Institutions are asking physicians to directly solicit their patients for donations with variability in physicians' perceptions of the impact on relationships with patients and responses toward those requests.

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