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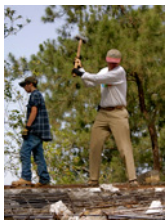
Mark Kris, MD, FACP, FACCP [1]



For oncologists, caring for patients means more than treating their cancer. It's a comprehensive effort to coordinate their care and maximize their quality of life, both during and after treatment. To Dr. Mark Kris, a lung cancer specialist, this aspect of clinical oncology is what's so gratifying about his chosen career.

?When you think of the term â€˜specialist', you don't typically think of a doctor that cares for the whole person,? says Kris. ?But that's exactly what oncologists do.?

Dr. Kris' inspiration to pursue his path in medicine was that he saw an unmet need. When he finished medical school in 1977, the outlook for people with lung cancer was grim. Most lived only a few months after their diagnosis, and available treatments often came with terrible side effects.

To make matters worse, the stigma of lung cancer - often viewed as a self-inflicted disease caused by smoking- meant that patients were saddled with an additional burden and relatively little research was being done to improve treatment.

?When you look at all the illnesses that people suffer from, lung cancer was one that was really misunderstood and didn't receive nearly the attention it deserved,? Dr. Kris said. ?I saw that there was a tremendous need to offer lung cancer patients some hope.?

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Following medical school, Dr. Kris began specializing in lung cancer during a fellowship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. In 1983, he joined the center's staff. Since then, Dr. Kris' research has had an impact on many different aspects of patient care. For example, he has played a key role in the development of new, genetically-targeted treatments for lung cancer, and has done critical work on management of the side effects associated with treatment.

During the course of his career, the outlook for lung cancer patients has improved significantly. ?Today, between 30,000 and 50,000 lung cancer patients are cured every year,? says Dr. Kris.

?This is because we've vastly improved our understanding of the disease and its biology, we've created better tools for treating it, and have worked out how to make the best care available to everyone through guidelines.?

But he says that the greatest change he's witnessed has been in patients' quality of life.

?When I started, treatment for lung cancer was debilitating. Patients had no choice but to check into a hospital for their chemotherapy because the side effects were so intense. The nausea, the vomitingâ€"it was truly awful? he recalled. ?Now, you can get treated in the morning and be back at work in the afternoon. I have patients who start their day receiving chemotherapy, and they spend their time during the infusion with their friends deciding what restaurant they will go to for lunch. These improvements have come about in part because of Dr. Kris' work on antiemetics - drugs that relieve vomiting and nausea - for use in oncology. Cancer patients can now take medications that are remarkably effective at preventing the debilitating side effects often associated with chemotherapy. In addition to nausea, these problems include fatigue, harmful effects to bone marrow, and others.

Dr. Kris' interest in managing side effects extends beyond his own research and work with patients. Through his work with ASCO, he has helped to standardize antiemetic use in oncology, ensuring that more patients receive the best available supportive care. In fact, a guideline co-authored by Dr. Kris on the usage of antiemetics in oncology is the most downloaded guideline that ASCO has produced.

Dr. Kris credits ASCO for providing a forum to exchange clinical research, accelerate the search for new treatments, and get the best we have to as many patients as possible through the guidelines..

?One reason that research is so important is that it gives patients hope,? Dr. Kris noted. ?If they have a cancer for which there isn't a sure-fire treatment, it helps to know that their doctors are working to find a better option.?

Outside his medical career, Dr. Kris frequently volunteers his time to causes he believes in. In 2005, he joined the recovery effort following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, working on home rebuilding in Biloxi, Mississippi and Dulac, Louisiana. More recently, he traveled to Haiti after the country's devastating earthquake to work with survivors.

But after nearly 30 years as an oncologist, patients with lung cancer remain Dr. Kris' biggest inspiration. ?Patients with cancer want their life back,? he said. ?I've had the opportunity to help make that happen for a lot of patients, and it's been very gratifying.?

Watch a video about Dr. Kris, and his winning the 2011 *ASCO Humanitarian Award*

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Mark G. Kris, MD, FACP, FACCP, specializes in thoracic cancer as Chief of the Thoracic Oncology Service at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and is a Professor of Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College. His research focuses on the development of biology-based treatments that specifically attack lung cancer, multimodality therapies, and drugs to control

physical symptoms caused by cancer and its treatment. Dr. Kris is the current Chair of ASCO's Cancer Communications Committee, Co-Chair of the CCO-ASCO Adjuvant Therapy for Stages I-IIIa Lung Cancer Panel, and a member of the Anti-Emetics Panel and Timely Oncology Perspectives Task Force. Among his accolades are a 2010 ASCO Statesman Award and an American Cancer Society Clinical Oncology Career Development Award.

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Links:
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