

History of ACE

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The Oncology Group
ACE Founding President

Long ago and far away...Okay, it wasn't so long ago and certainly not that far away. But in the fall of 1994, a group of seasoned (far be it for me to say old) cancer program administrators met in Chicago to start a new organization that met their needs.

This group of dedicated cancer program administrators had identified a deficit of oncology leadership education and networking opportunities in other national oncology organizations at that time. While there were numerous organizations for specific needs and some which had separate sessions for cancer program administrators, none met the distinct needs this group of administrators had identified. As the role of the oncology program administrator became more prominent (in stature, responsibility, and number), there was a natural evolution to form a dedicated organization to meet the changing needs. They conceived the idea of a professional association which would support oncology leaders with state of the art oncology information in a setting which promoted interpersonal networking, mutual support and leadership integrity between membership and an Executive Board.

The early representatives were from diverse settings – community programs, academic programs, free standing centers – with diverse needs. But one thing was in common...the distinct issues related to oncology program management.

The original planning members included:

- Marsha Fountain
- Karen Gilden
- Catherine Harvey
- Sharon MacDonald
- Terry McKay
- William Mifsud
- A. R. (Roy) Threet

Knowing the organization required some seed money, the planning committee approached potential sponsors. Without hesitation, the founding sponsors gave us a total of \$40,000 for start up funds. These Founding sponsors were PRR, Amgen, Bristol Meyers Squibb, Siemens Medical Systems and Impac Medical Systems. Without their commitment, the organization would have never taken off. As importantly, one of the founding board members, Roy Threet, arranged for his organization (CTRC in San Antonio) to assist us by providing the start up funds for legal fees (to set up the organization) and to hold the first meeting until the cash flow was such we could reimburse them.

Rita Cippolo was hired as the Executive Director and the office was set up in her home in Downer's Grove, Illinois outside Chicago.

Our original thoughts were small. We expected to have about 100 - 150 members and required that these members have administrative responsibilities over at least 2 components of oncology care – the true cancer program administrator. The fun part was coming up with a name. We struggled with what defined us, finally setting on the term that we were indeed Cancer Executives, not just administrators or directors. Thus, the Association of Cancer Executives was born.

During the initial meetings, a set of documents were drawn up including the original bylaws and mission/vision statements and developed an annual meeting/conference to disseminate knowledge and to provide close networking to support individual growth and information exchange.

The founding members felt strongly that cancer was a multidisciplinary disease and all disciplines should be represented. Thus, the decision was made to include physicians on the Board and have them be an integral part of the organization. After the bylaws were prepared and approved, an expanded group of senior cancer program administrators and medical directors were invited to serve as the Founding Board. The original ACE Board members were:

Marsha Fountain, President
Sharon MacDonald, President Elect
Teresa McKay, Secretary
A. R. (Roy) Threet, Treasurer
Karen Gilden, Editor, Cancer Management
Don Abdullah
Kathleen Burns
Robert Dillman, MD
Nancy Harris
Catherine Harvey
Michael Martin
William Mifsud
Harold Wallace, MD

Our first annual meeting in 1995 in San Antonio was fraught with concern – would people come? There were other options for attendees. Could we afford it? But, with the help of great sponsors, a trim budget and 57 dedicated members who supported us, we were successful.

At the first meeting, we had focus groups with members to determine what they wanted to have from the association. Ellen Tobin led those groups for the

organization and these reports led our program development for a number of years.

In 1996, under the guidance of Karen Gilden as editor in chief and the support of John Gentile and Mary Schuldner of PRR, Cancer Management, our official publication, was launched as a “peer reviewed multidisciplinary forum to exchange practical information and ideas among professionals involved in day – to-day operations of cancer centers, specialty cancer networks and cancer care services”. This continued until the ACE Update replaced it as an electronic publication.

The locations of each annual meeting was rotated across the United States to enable administrators from all areas of the country to attend with attention to regional and seasonal calendar challenges (i.e. winter travel barriers, holidays, spring break, etc).

In the ensuing years, the membership and attendance has continued to mature and grow. It has become an organization to join as a new cancer program executive. Due to the need for new cancer program executives to catch up quickly, Oncology 101/201 was created in 2004 and has successfully been held for each subsequent year.

Subsequent Boards have continued to support the original vision of ACE while expanding the scope of the organization members.

One never knows when an idea will take hold and bloom. When we sat around that proverbial “smoke-filled room”, we had a dream and an idea to fill a need. ACE has come to truly meet that dream.