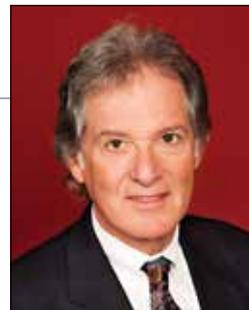


LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



I am an almost compulsive recycler. I fervently retrieve errant articles from the trash at home and place them into the recycling bin where they belong, along with every shred of paper and drink container. (I think this practice stems from my childhood, doctor . . .)

A couple of weeks prior to the 2014 American Society of Clinical Oncology® (ASCO) annual meeting, I started to receive a daily surprise. I was inundated by dozens of cards in the mail advertising one company booth or another. There were too many to read, and most of them either were from companies I had never heard of (and whose name I would soon forget after discarding the mail) or dealt with products that were irrelevant to my patient population. I recycled the cards with glee! I thought that the supply might be exhausted when I arrived at the ASCO meeting, but to my delight, a bag of treasures landed on my doorstep every morning, and I tossed them into the appropriate section of the trash can in my room with satisfaction. I was even pleased to find a straggler or two arrive at home after the meeting was over.

In January 2006, I wrote my favorite letter for *Clinical Advances in Hematology & Oncology*. The letter was on the top 10 giveaways from the American Society of Hematology meeting, and it reflected on all of the notepads, USB drives, laser pointers, pens, and other corporate memorabilia that filled my desk drawers at work. The purist in me was delighted when such ephemera were banned from the meetings, as they were certain to bias our treating practices. Was it mere coincidence that the ban took place soon after my publication?

But leave it to corporate ingenuity to beat the system! One could say, “It took balls.” This year, I was intrigued by 2 items that arrived in my mailbox ahead of the meeting. The first came in an 8” × 12” Priority Mail box. When I picked it up, I was puzzled (should I have been alarmed?) to hear it rattle. I zipped it open to find a lone metal ball bearing rolling around, with an invitation to come to a corporate booth where—if I turned in my new treasure—an unspecified amount of money would be donated to charity.

Now there were at least 4 problems with this offer: (1) a box that rattles may cause unease in these times of terror; (2) a number of colleagues received boxes that were squashed in transit and arrived empty—a heartbreaking disappointment! (3) there really was no need to bring the ball to the booth for the company to make the donation (so why waste the money to send the boxes?); and (4) there was a rumor (which I hope was true) that one physician opened the box to find a book by Dr Seuss (perhaps it was titled *One Ball Two Ball No Ball at All!*), which would be far preferable to a simple metal marble. My visit to said booth to express my sentiments about the scheme apparently made an impression, because the Chief Executive Officer of the company is coming to pay me a visit next week. I will express my belief that these promotional companies have too much (overly paid for) time on their hands and too little sense of what is appropriate.

The second gift came in a much smaller box, with a padded insert within which I found a key. “Bring this key to our booth to see what prize you have won!!” read the message. So I went to the exhibit hall, key in trembling hand, found the listing for the booth location, sped off to my destination, and walked around and around in disbelief: I was unable to locate it! Despondent, I went off to a session for lack of anything better to do.

I wonder how many attendees actually pay any attention to the piles of cards and assorted objects that come their way. Has there been an impact survey? The profession would be better served if all of the money spent on these activities were spent instead on supporting education, research, advocacy, and the careers of young investigators.

Until next month . . .

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Bruce D. Cheson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce D. Cheson, MD