

The “ASC(ST)O” Meeting



In another week, I will be heading off to Chicago for the “ASC(ST)O” meeting. Fewer and fewer of my colleagues in the field of malignant hematology are attending each year. The reason is in my suggested new name for the organization: the “American Society of Clinical Solid Tumor Oncology.”

Of necessity, we make our hotel and flight reservations months in advance of the meeting; however, we have no idea what to expect until the program finally appears, which it did just a couple of weeks ago. The abstracts finally became available on May 13th, and to say that my reaction was one of dismay would be a bit of an understatement. Yes, there are a number of educational sessions in my field, but oral presentations are few. I like Chicago a whole lot: the Art Institute of Chicago is splendid, the architectural tours by boat afford a wonderful view of this exceptional city, and the shopping and restaurants are first-rate. However, there is only so much I can do to fill the grand gaps between oral sessions. On Saturday afternoon, there will be presentations of the abstracts on acute and chronic leukemia plus myelodysplastic and myeloproliferative syndromes, all in a single session. I then have to wait until Monday morning for Hodgkin and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. I had booked my initial return flight for early Monday morning, but had to change my reservation in order to attend this session and to see 2 of my own abstracts presented. The oral session on multiple myeloma does not occur until Tuesday morning. Despite the plethora of new agents and combinations thereof for lymphoma and chronic lymphocytic leukemia, few abstracts actually include innovative data.

'Tis a self-fulfilling prophesy. As we hematologic oncologists receive less and less attention, fewer and fewer of our ilk either submit abstracts or go to the meeting and there are fewer sessions for us to attend. This problem is compounded by the spacing out of the 3 diseases on different days. At least if they were on the same day, we could

come, view, and leave without spending expanses of time with nothing to do but see the town or wander around the exhibit hall hunting for cookies and frozen yogurt. For many years in the past, I participated on ASCO committees or attended Board of Directors meetings. But, those days are past—although I do plan to visit the *Clinical Advances in Hematology & Oncology* booth to see what is new and exciting.

One possible retort to this complaint is that the program is designed for general oncologists, not for academics and specialists. Moreover, we blood cancer folk already have our International Conference on Malignant Lymphoma in Lugano, Switzerland every 2 years, international meetings for myeloma and myelodysplastic syndromes, and the American Society of Hematology meeting every December as venues for presentation of cutting-edge research. So why should we complain about the dearth of malignant hematology at ASC(ST)O? Because for years it was a meeting for all of us, loaded with abstracts describing new and interesting data. It was an honor to present there to an audience including our peers. And now it is a mere ghost of meetings past.

So, off to Chicago I will go to give a presentation at a CME symposium on Friday night, do some networking on Saturday, perhaps participate in a poster discussion on Sunday night, and attend oral abstracts on Monday. I will then head to my 2 PM flight back home, asking myself whether this year's ASC(ST)O meeting will, indeed, be the last for me as well.

Until next month . . .

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

Bruce D. Cheson, MD