



**AMERICAN SOCIETY
FOR RADIATION ONCOLOGY**

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April 19, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO), representing more than 10,000 global members of the radiation oncology team including multi-disciplinary researchers and clinicians, we are committed to working with you to re-ignite the Cancer Moonshot to end cancer as we know it. An all-of-government approach, in partnership with the private sector, is essential to achieve this goal, and we are grateful for the opportunity to share our ideas. We appreciate your recent call for the medical and scientific community to offer ideas and actions to inform the Cancer Moonshot, and we are providing the information below to demonstrate how ASTRO and the radiation oncology community are ready, willing and able partners.

ASTRO is the largest radiation oncology society in the world, with members including radiation oncologists, nurses, radiation therapists, medical physicists, basic cancer scientists, radiation biologists, and other health care professionals. These dedicated medical professionals work in a variety of clinical and research settings, including hospitals, cancer treatment centers and academic research facilities, and treat more than one million Americans with cancer each year. Radiation oncology is a central modality in cancer treatment; approximately two-thirds of people diagnosed with cancer receive radiation for cure and/or palliation of their cancer.

ASTRO has supported the Cancer Moonshot initiative from day one. We write to reiterate our strong support of your leadership on the initiative and ask that radiation oncology be a major component in leading your transformative vision for cancer research and care. Radiation oncology is a highly multi-disciplinary field, implementing the best of translational, technological, physics and clinical advances. We are uniquely well positioned to advance computational and technical areas of science, and well poised to engage in imaging, informatics and data science advances for cancer care. In particular, we strongly recommend that research on artificial intelligence-enabled precision radiotherapy, radiopharmaceuticals, radiation-immunotherapeutic combinations, ultra-high-dose rate (FLASH) radiotherapy, proton/particle therapy and survivorship care should be among the priorities for the Moonshot initiative, given their potential to greatly benefit cancer patients in the very near future.

As you know, investments in cancer research have led to meaningful improvements for people with cancer, including increased cure rates and reduced side effects. ASTRO strongly supports cancer research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Further investments in biomedical research will accelerate the pace of breakthroughs in cancer treatments, improve outcomes and increase the quality of life for patients and survivors. ASTRO seeks to work with your Administration on ways to advance the science of radiation therapy and cancer biology to maximize the ability of radiation oncologists and radiation scientists to target tumors while minimizing side effects and complications. This includes investigation into new and exciting approaches to delivering radiation therapy, and we believe the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health will be key to achieving these breakthroughs. NCI Director Dr. Ned Sharpless has convened a Radiation Oncology Working Group to identify unanswered questions that are critical to advance the field of radiation oncology. Importantly, many of these domains are central for radiation therapy as well as other oncology fields. The prioritized areas are:

- Mechanisms of Radiation Resistance
- Drug Development and Radiation Modalities
- Immunotherapy and Radiation Therapy
- Radiopharmaceuticals
- Proton and Particle Therapy
- Data Science / Informatics

Radiation oncology draws the brightest physicians and scientists into the field. We are eager to actively participate in the Cancer Moonshot and believe our expertise and passion can provide meaningful contributions.

In addition to great minds ready to apply knowledge and vision to your goal to end cancer as we know it, radiation oncology also represents a key component of our nation's cancer treatment infrastructure. With nearly 2,500 clinics nationwide, in big cities and small rural communities, radiation oncology has contributed meaningfully to increased cancer survival in recent years and is ready to help you cut the cancer death rate by 50% over the next 25 years. We are ready to do our part by devoting cutting-edge technology and highly skilled clinicians and researchers to this worthy cause.

ASTRO recommends that the Moonshot focus on addressing health disparities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those affecting people with cancer. ASTRO strongly supports efforts to ensure that access to clinical trials reflects diverse populations and that payment policy should be leveraged to reduce disparities. Specifically, ASTRO has proposed ways to identify populations at-risk for not completing their potentially life-saving course of radiation therapy and to provide those patients with resources to ensure they complete treatment and experience better outcomes. We look forward to advancing this proposal to improve health equity with your Administration as part of the Moonshot initiative.

Radiation oncology is also leading the way in creating fair informatics solutions to increase data liquidity for patients, researchers and clinicians. Through our involvement with the national Common Oncology Data Elements eXtensions (CodeX) and Minimal Common Oncology Data Elements (mCODE) initiatives, we are working to greatly increase the amount of high-quality shareable data available to support patient care. With their focus on creating standards to improve the quality and consistency of data in oncology, these efforts

support the Moonshot initiative's goals of learning from all patients, making data meaningful, comparable and available, and advancing health equity in cancer research, care and surveillance.

ASTRO is committed to preserving and enhancing access to cancer care, including high-quality radiation therapy, and we believe that expanding patient access should be an important focus of the Moonshot initiative. Key to ASTRO's commitment is ensuring that private and public payers cover evidence-based radiation therapy services and provide adequate reimbursement to support treatment close to patients' homes. ASTRO remains committed to episode-based alternative payment models that will drive adherence to nationally recognized clinical guidelines and improve patient outcomes. Such models should also lean on existing quality improvement initiatives. ASTRO and radiation oncology have led the way on efforts to ensure patients receiving radiation therapy receive the highest quality and safest care, most notably through ASTRO's APEX - Accreditation Program for Excellence[®] and the RO-ILS: Radiation Oncology-Incident Learning System[®] patient safety initiative.

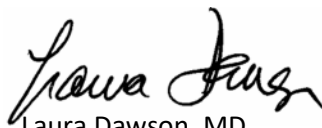
To ensure a robust, equitable cancer treatment network, Medicare is obligated to provide fair reimbursement for radiation therapy services, and we look forward to working with your Administration to end the cycle of arbitrary payment cuts to radiation oncology totaling 20% over the last decade. These cuts selectively impact the most vulnerable clinics and communities. Cancer treatment advancements and innovations will continue to be stymied unless radiation oncology payment stability is achieved, and the Medicare physician fee schedule is reformed. Finally, ASTRO believes that patients with commercial insurance must have access to the life-saving radiation treatments their premiums have paid for over the years. To do so, we recommend that your Administration closely examine how prior authorization consistently delays cancer care, leads to unnecessary anxiety and negatively impacts survival. Radiation oncologists and other providers have reported that health plans are misusing prior authorization and creating needless treatment delays and denials that endanger patients' health. In an ASTRO survey, 69% of clinic leaders said the burden of prior authorization increased for their practices during the pandemic. As a result, 85% of their patients expressed concern about delays in cancer care caused by prior authorization. ASTRO urges the Moonshot initiative to consider policies that increase transparency and efficacy in prior authorization practices to ensure the highest quality of care for critically ill patients.

Thank you for consideration of the many ways that radiation oncology can contribute meaningfully to the Cancer Moonshot and its worthy goals. We look forward to working with you to improve the lives of people with cancer and their loved ones. Please contact Dave Adler, ASTRO's Vice President of Advocacy, at dave.adler@astro.org or 703-839-7362, with any questions and follow-up on these ideas.

Sincerely,



Laura I. Thevenot
Chief Executive Officer



Laura Dawson, MD
Chair of the Board of Directors

cc. Alondra Nelson, PhD, Acting Director, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
Dr. Francis Collins, MD, PhD, Acting Science Advisor to the President
Danielle Carnival, PhD, Cancer Moonshot Coordinator