Three accomplished physicians awarded ASTRO’s highest honor

Gospodarowicz, Gunderson and Tarbell will receive ASTRO Gold Medal during Society’s 56th Annual Meeting in San Francisco

Fairfax, Va., June 18, 2014 – The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) will award Mary K. Gospodarowicz, MD, FASTRO, Leonard L. Gunderson, MD, MS, FASTRO, and Nancy J. Tarbell, MD, FASTRO, with the Society’s highest honor—the ASTRO Gold Medal. The 2014 awardees will receive the ASTRO Gold Medal during the Awards Ceremony on Tuesday, September 16, 2014, at ASTRO’s 56th Annual Meeting, September 14-17, 2014, at Moscone Center in San Francisco.

ASTRO’s Gold Medal, first awarded in 1977, is bestowed annually on esteemed ASTRO members who have made exceptional contributions to the field of radiation oncology, including work in research, clinical care, teaching and service. Including the three 2014 awardees named above, only 75 of ASTRO’s more than 10,000 members have received the Gold Medal.

Candidates must be nominated by one Active member (Board certified radiation oncologist, Board certified medical physicist or radiation biologist) of ASTRO and receive letters of support from two additional Active members of ASTRO, detailing the nominee’s impact on the advancement of radiation oncology. Nominees may be from any of the scientific disciplines represented in ASTRO’s membership, including radiation oncology, biology and physics.

“Congratulations to my distinguished colleagues, Drs. Gospodarowicz, Gunderson and Tarbell for being recognized with the ASTRO Gold Medal,” said ASTRO Chair Colleen A.F. Lawton,
MD, FASTRO. “They have each greatly impacted the field of radiation oncology through their research, clinical work and passion for providing high-quality care. Their contributions to our specialty will continue to improve the lives of cancer patients worldwide.”

Dr. Gospodarowicz is a radiation oncologist at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto and a 33-year ASTRO member who has had a major impact on several areas of radiation oncology, including the treatment of malignant lymphomas and genitourinary cancers, global health and the use of radiation treatment worldwide, and the mentoring of trainees.

“My career has been very eclectic, and to be recognized by my peers and colleagues is extremely meaningful,” Dr. Gospodarowicz said. “Throughout my career and my roles as clinician, researcher, teacher, administrator and leader, I have focused on promoting radiation therapy as an integral tool for treating cancer patients worldwide.”

Dr. Gospodarowicz’s research has focused on radiation therapy for lymphomas and genitourinary cancers, including prostate cancer, bladder cancer, and seminoma, as well as studies of secondary cancers and other late effects of treatment. She has published numerous seminal papers on the risk of secondary cancers following radiation therapy and chemotherapy for Hodgkin and non-Hodgkin lymphomas, and seminoma. Dr. Gospodarowicz and her colleagues at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre pioneered systematic studies of surveillance in place of routine use of abdominal and thoracic radiation for early-stage seminoma. This change has helped reduce the risk of these patients developing complications and the risk of secondary cancer.

In addition to her research, Dr. Gospodarowicz’s more recent work has focused on global health and the role of radiation therapy in treating cancer patients worldwide. She is currently the president of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), an international organization dedicated to helping reduce the worldwide cancer burden, promote greater equity in cancer control, and place cancer on the global health and development agenda. In this role, Dr. Gospodarowicz created the Global Task Force on Radiotherapy for Cancer Control (GTFRCC) to determine what it would take to close the gap between what exists today and equitable access to radiotherapy for cancer globally.
“I have been struck by the fact that radiation oncology has little presence in global health and the global cancer arena,” she said. “The goal of the GTFRCC is to put radiation therapy in the forefront as an essential cancer treatment modality. We want to inform the world that radiation therapy is an extremely useful treatment that can cure a large number of patients and palliate many.”

Throughout her career, Dr. Gospodarowicz has mentored trainees and young professionals in the field, emphasizing both clinical and leadership skills. She has also helped develop research masters and doctoral tracks for radiation therapists within the University of Toronto’s Department of Radiation Oncology. Dr. Gospodarowicz is the medical director of the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre at the University Health Network in Toronto and the Regional Vice-President of Cancer Care Ontario.

As a 38-year ASTRO member and former Chair of ASTRO’s Board of Directors (2011-2012), Dr. Gunderson has made significant contributions to radiation oncology through research and clinical practice in gastrointestinal (GI) cancers, as well as service to ASTRO through his dedication to numerous committees and his nine years serving on ASTRO’s Board of Directors.

“I have had the fortunate opportunity to conduct clinical research and to accomplish scholarly contributions in the area of GI cancers (colorectal, gastric/GE junction, pancreas, biliary tract, anal) and soft tissue sarcomas (extremity, retroperitoneal) that have significantly impacted patient care,” Dr. Gunderson said.

In the 1970s, Dr. Gunderson published a definitive study, “Areas of failure found at reoperation (second of symptomatic look) following ‘curative surgery’ for adenocarcinoma of the rectum. Clinicopathologic correlation and implications for adjuvant therapy,” in Cancer on the relapse patterns found by second-look surgery in patients treated for rectal cancer. The analysis of this study led to radiation oncologists tailoring radiation fields to the particular sites where disease did recur, rather than estimating where the risk existed. This study, along with his similar study on gastric cancer, still holds influence today— radiation oncology textbooks today still use many of the diagrams from Dr. Gunderson’s study to help define radiation therapy field arrangements and protocols for GI cancers.
His additional research has focused on defining the indications for and results of external beam irradiation as a component of multi-modality treatment alone or in conjunction with systemic therapy, with or without surgical resection, for GI cancers and soft tissue sarcomas. Dr. Gunderson has also teamed with his surgical colleagues to evaluate the role of intraoperative irradiation plus maximal surgical resection for patients with locally advanced primary and locally recurrent gastrointestinal and other cancers. He is the senior editor/co-editor of three leading oncology textbooks: Cancer of the Colon, Rectum and Anus (first edition), Intraoperative Irradiation: Techniques and Results (first and second editions) and Clinical Radiation Oncology (first, second and third editions, with a fourth edition pending publication).

In addition to his clinical and research work, Dr. Gunderson has held many positions within ASTRO including service on the Annual Meeting Scientific Committee, Bylaws Committee, Annual Meeting Steering Committee, and Finance and Audit Committee. He was a member of ASTRO’s Board of Directors from 2003-2008 and 2009-2013, first as secretary/treasurer (2003-2008), and then as president-elect (2009-2010), president (2010-2011), chair (2011-2012) and immediate past chair (2012-2013).

“It has been a privilege and an opportunity to mentor many residents and staff colleagues within the field of radiation oncology and associated disciplines. I feel strongly about the advantages of a team approach in the triad of patient care, research and education, and in having successful shared-leadership within institutional departments, organizations and families. Effective mentoring helps achieve these goals,” said Dr. Gunderson, an emeritus professor and consultant in the department of radiation oncology at the Mayo Clinic.

Dr. Tarbell, a radiation oncologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and 29-year ASTRO member, has had a major influence on pediatric oncology and radiation therapy, and has worked to expand the role of women faculty in radiation oncology and beyond. She specializes in pediatric brain tumors and has made significant contributions in cancer biology and radiation physics.

“I feel fortunate to be able to take care of children with cancer, and I am proud of the multidisciplinary team approach, which has included medical physicists, biologists and clinicians
that provided me with the opportunity to help improve the treatment of children with cancer,” she said. “Studying the long-term effects of treatment allowed me to move precision radiation techniques forward.”

An internationally recognized expert in pediatric oncology and radiation therapy, Dr. Tarbell’s research has examined ways to provide curative treatment programs for children with malignant disease and to develop effective strategies to decrease the late effects of treatment. For more than 20 years, Dr. Tarbell has been an active member of the Brain Tumor Committee of the Children’s Oncology Group and served as the principal investigator on medulloblastoma protocols. She is credited with establishing the current standard of care for children with high-risk medulloblastoma.

More recently, her research has focused on the use of proton beam therapy in pediatric brain tumors and sarcomas, examining the feasibility, effectiveness, and dosimetric and physics aspects of particle radiation therapy. She is the co-author of the medical textbook *Pediatric Radiation Oncology*, now in its fifth edition, and is a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science.

Dr. Tarbell has also dedicated her career to fostering the growth of students, residents, fellows and faculty in radiation oncology, particularly women. She was the founding director of the Office for Women’s Careers and the Office of Faculty Development at Massachusetts General Hospital, and introduced programming to support and educate women about paths to promotion, improving negotiating skills and managing work/family balance. She also co-chaired the Women in Academic Medicine Committee at Massachusetts General Hospital, which brought in senior leaders from across the institution to address policy concerns and identify institutional obstacles to women’s advancement.

“I grew up in a house of six girls. This was a wonderful environment for true ‘division of labor’ without gender bias. In addition, I benefited greatly from the mentorship of Sam Hellman, MD, FASTRO, while he was chair of the Harvard Joint Center for Radiation Therapy. He mentored deeply and intuitively and continues to be an extraordinary leader today. He gave me opportunities when there were few women role models. I hope that I have shared like-opportunities with the many
young men and women whom I have taught, particularly women,” said Dr. Tarbell, the dean for academic and clinical affairs at Harvard Medical School in Boston and the C.C. Wang Professor of Radiation Oncology at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

For more information about ASTRO’s 56th Annual Meeting, visit www.astro.org/AnnualMeeting.

For press registration and media policies for ASTRO’s 56th Annual Meeting, visit www.astro.org/AMpress.

ABOUT ASTRO

ASTRO is the premier radiation oncology society in the world, with more than 10,000 members who are physicians, nurses, biologist, physicists, radiation therapists, dosimetrist and other health care professionals that specialize in treating patients with radiation therapies. As the leading organization in radiation oncology, the Society is dedicated to improving patient care through professional education and training, support for clinical practice and health policy standards, advancement of science and research, and advocacy. ASTRO publishes two medical journals, International Journal of Radiation Oncology • Biology • Physics (www.redjournal.org) and Practical Radiation Oncology (www.practicalradonc.org); developed and maintains an extensive patient website, www.rtanswers.org; and created the Radiation Oncology Institute (www.roinstitute.org), a non-profit foundation to support research and education efforts around the world that enhance and confirm the critical role of radiation therapy in improving cancer treatment. To learn more about ASTRO, visit www.astro.org.

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