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Commentary

Enhancing the Diversity of the Cancer Leadership Pipeline

By Caryn Lerman, PhD



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Commentary Overview

- A diverse and well-prepared leadership workforce in the nation's cancer centers is vital to tackle national challenges in the delivery of equitable cancer care.
- A Leadership Diversity and Development Initiative (LDDI), steering committee has established best practices for ensuring diversity and fostering a culture that supports career development.
- In November, AACI will host a program for emerging leaders at AACI cancer centers, covering topics including communication, negotiation, and leading with authenticity.

A diverse and well-prepared leadership workforce in the nation's cancer centers is vital to tackle national challenges in the delivery of equitable cancer care. As part of my AACI Presidential Initiative—the Leadership Diversity and Development Initiative (LDDI)—AACI conducted a survey of its cancer centers in 2021 to assess diversity in cancer center leadership. Among the findings, survey data showed dramatic underrepresentation of women, ethnic, and racial minorities in cancer center leadership. This lack of diversity permeated all cancer center senior leadership roles, suggesting that sole reliance on the current leadership pipeline will not produce a diverse cancer center leadership workforce nor will it provide a diverse pool of mentors for emerging leaders.

With input from an exceptional AACI presidential initiative steering committee, AACI developed recommendations for ensuring diversity and fostering a culture that supports career development. The results of this survey and recommendations will be published in *The Journal of the National Cancer Institute* on July 28.

A Solid Foundation for Emerging Leaders

In addition to building a toolkit of best practices for AACI cancer centers, AACI will host a pilot

leadership development program for AACI members, **November 8-9**, at Loews Chicago O'Hare Hotel in Rosemont, IL. Renowned leadership coaches and consultants will provide didactic and experiential training in persuasive communication, negotiation, and leading with authenticity and impact. In addition, a panel of AACI cancer center leaders will share their experiences forging their own paths to cancer center leadership and participants will have ample opportunities for networking.

The workshops aim to convene up to 104 emerging leaders, one from each AACI member center. AACI is encouraging each center to nominate one emerging leader to attend. Nominees should represent a wide variety of backgrounds and cancer center roles with a focus on deputy and associate directors and research program leaders. New cancer center directors—within two years of appointment—are encouraged to nominate themselves. AACI is seeking participants from underrepresented groups based on ethnicity, race, gender, and gender identity. Candidates should have a track record of leadership or evidence of a desire for a higher leadership role, strong communication skills, and active engagement in cancer center activities.

A workshop agenda will be available on August 1. The nomination period will run from August 1 to 15. The LDDI steering committee will review the applications and choose qualified candidates to attend the workshops.

As we consider developing the next generation of leaders to accelerate progress against cancer, we must place a high value on ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion. By expanding leadership opportunities within our own cancer centers, we will be better equipped to address the significant disparities that pervade the U.S. health care system and make important strides toward cancer health equity.

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Our Mission

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) represents 104 premier academic and freestanding cancer centers in the United States and Canada. AACI is accelerating progress against cancer by empowering North America's leading cancer centers in their shared mission to alleviate suffering.

About AACI Commentary

To promote the work of its members, AACI publishes *Commentary*, a monthly editorial series focusing on major issues of common interest to North American cancer centers, authored by cancer center leaders and subject matter experts.



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