

Dr. James A. Tulsky Receives American Cancer Society Pathfinder in Palliative Care Award

Durham, N.C. – October 22, 2014— James A. Tulsky, M.D., chief of Duke Palliative Care and professor of Medicine and Nursing at Duke University, has been named the 2014 recipient of the American Cancer Society Pathfinder in Palliative Care Award. The national award, presented October 21 at the Kathleen Foley Palliative Care Research Retreat in Park City, Utah, recognizes outstanding achievements of a professional who has demonstrated remarkable innovation and ingenuity contributing to the advancement of the palliative care field. Dr. Tulsky received the award for his work on oncologist/patient communication; being an advocate for palliative and supportive care research; contributing to the field's growth and direction; and mentorship of faculty in palliative care research.

In the 1990s, Tulsky was the first to examine how residents and faculty talk to patients about resuscitative choices. His landmark study identified major deficiencies in communication and he became a leader in developing interventions to improve clinician communication skills. The hallmark of his work has been a focus on what physicians and patients say during medical encounters. This led to the development of a National Cancer Institute (NCI) funded online intervention which improved the oncologist's ability to identify and respond to empathic opportunities and improved trust between clinician and patient. Last month he was awarded a \$1.7 million grant from the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to disseminate this intervention with oncologists nationwide through a partnership with the American Board of Internal Medicine. This project will allow physicians to receive feedback from patients on their own audio-recorded encounters and thus improve their communication skills.

A strong advocate, Dr. Tulsky is constantly promoting excellence in the field of palliative and supportive care. At Duke, he leads a comprehensive, integrated palliative care clinical program across a health system. Among its innovations is Duke's novel approach encouraging inpatient co-management of cancer patients by palliative care and oncology. He has promoted interdisciplinary palliative care research through his membership on the Advisory Council of the NIH National Institute for Nursing Research. He was also a member of the Institute of Medicine Committee that recently authored the highly influential study on "Dying in America," that recommended major changes to the way seriously ill patients are cared for in this country.

Dr. Tulsky is one of the founders of Vital Talk, a nonprofit with the mission of nurturing healthier connections between patients and clinicians. He was one of the developers of OncoTalk and OncoTalk Teach, educational programs which help oncologists improve their communication skills. He has partnered with the American Cancer Society to create Vital Talk workshops for clinicians focusing on talking to patients about quality of life and goals of care.

Demonstrating nurturing leadership, Dr. Tulsky mentors the next generation of investigators. He chairs the Clinical and Health Services Research branch of the Duke Department of Medicine Faculty Development Academy, and recently received the Duke University 2014 Clinical Science Research Mentoring Award. His mentees report a strong willingness to share what he has learned about being a researcher over his 30-year career. As chair of the Greenwall Faculty Scholars Program he has also extended to the field of bioethics his commitment to the development of future academic leaders.

“Dr. Tulsky’s name has become synonymous with excellence in palliative care communication research and his work has planted the seeds for the next generation,” said Dr. Richard Wender, chief cancer control officer for the American Cancer Society. “We are so pleased to acknowledge and celebrate his many outstanding contributions.”

"I am humbled and honored to receive this award," Tulsky said. "The American Cancer Society is the voice of our patients and has done such important work to enhance the quality of cancer care. I have been particularly grateful for its leadership role advocating for quality of life and access to palliative care services. The Pathfinders Award recognizes the importance of treating the whole patient and making sure that all needs are met as individuals and their families experience living with cancer."

Palliative care focuses on managing the pain, symptoms and stress of serious illness at any age and any stage of disease. Through an innovative partnership with the National Palliative Care Research Center, the American Cancer Society has dedicated millions of extramural grant funds to support palliative care and symptom management research. Building on the success of that research program, the Society’s advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) is a driving force behind federal and state Quality of Life legislation to boost palliative care and pain management research, workforce training and access to these quality care services for all seriously ill adults and children in every care setting (acscan.org/qualityoflife).

About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is a global grassroots force of more than three million volunteers saving lives and fighting for every birthday threatened by every cancer in every community. As the largest voluntary health organization, the Society's efforts have contributed to a 20 percent decline in cancer death rates in the U.S. since 1991, and a 50 percent drop in smoking rates. Thanks in part to our progress nearly 14 million Americans who have had cancer and countless more who have avoided it will celebrate more birthdays this year. As we celebrate 100 years of service, we're determined to finish the fight against cancer. We're finding cures as the nation’s largest private, not-for-profit investor in cancer research, ensuring people facing cancer have the help they need and continuing the fight for access to quality health care, lifesaving screenings, clean air, and more. For more information, to get help, or to join the fight, call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 or visit cancer.org.
