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Commentary

Taking Cancer Clinical Research From Abstract to Reality Reflections on the 15th Annual AACI CRI Meeting

By Thomas J. George, MD, FACP



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Commentary Overview

- The 15th Annual AACI CRI Meeting set records for attendance, as well as for submitted and accepted abstracts and posters.
- The impressive turnout at the meeting underscored the demand for opportunities to network and learn from our peers face to face.
- Collaboration is key to the success of the CRI meeting, and to achieving our common mission to help reduce the burden of cancer through clinical research.
- Together, we can work to provide direction on the interpretation of policies, help identify software solutions to common problems, and advocate for adequate resources to effectively carry out our mission.

As chair-elect of AACI's Clinical Research Innovation (CRI) Steering Committee, I would like to thank the nearly 600 attendees—including over 60 individuals who participated virtually—for setting a new attendance record for the CRI annual meeting in Rosemont, IL. The 15th Annual AACI CRI Meeting also saw the largest number of abstracts submitted and accepted to the conference and the largest number of posters presented during the meeting.

In keeping with the theme of *Taking Cancer Clinical Research From Abstract to Reality*, the 118 **abstracts** highlighted new and innovative ways for us to "work smarter, not harder."

The number of cancer centers submitting abstracts, the breadth of topics addressed, the degree of innovation that was on display, and the sincere interest by participants in the abstract hall was inspiring. It is clear that staff at each of our AACI member centers are working hard to solve very

real clinical research challenges with creative and practical solutions.

I'd like to congratulate the first-, second-, and third-place authors of the abstract competition, who represent the following centers, respectively: Yale Cancer Center, Yale School of Medicine; Laura and Isaac Perlmutter Cancer Center at NYU Langone; and Medical College of Wisconsin Cancer Center. The lessons learned and strategies shared through the abstracts provide an invaluable roadmap for fellow AACI members to improve operations at their sites.

In addition to the abstracts and accompanying posters, meeting sessions explored creative ways to meet the needs of patients with cancer while being thoughtful stewards of limited resources.

We heard from experts on how to successfully use social media to improve clinical trial recruitment and enrollment; absorbed key leadership insights on effectively managing teams; discussed and debated the merits and challenges of operationalizing decentralized trials; gathered perspectives from other key stakeholders in the research, clinical, and administrative offices on how they see the value proposition for clinical research operations; and got some really good tips on teambuilding exercises in our new hybrid staff reality (hello, Music League!).

Harnessing Changes in CTO Culture to Improve the Way We Work

As the second in-person CRI meeting since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference balanced nostalgia for the "good old days" pre-COVID with recognition of positive cultural shifts in clinical trials offices (CTOs) over the past three years. Examples of new trends we'd collectively like to see continue and expand include the development of decentralized trials; electronic solutions to inefficiencies; career ladders to further professionalize opportunities for career development in clinical research; and novel educational and team-building tools to address hybrid and remote workforce needs. It's clear that, in some ways, we can't go back to the way we used to work – nor should we. But learning how to truly harness the power of these changes to improve our offices is part of the value of this meeting.

This year's record attendance, participation, and engagement underscored the demand for opportunities to socialize, network, and learn from our professional peers face to face. The many new colleagues at the meeting also highlighted the significant staffing changes cancer center CTOs have undergone over the past three years. Despite these major shifts, the CRI annual meeting continues to support the professional needs of seasoned clinical research professionals while engaging a new and energized research workforce. If this was your first meeting – welcome! If not, welcome back!

Building on Our Successes

The meeting's success is the culmination of a collective effort led by the CRI steering committee. As I look forward to beginning my term as CRI steering committee chair at the [2023 AACI/CCAF Annual Meeting](#) in October, I want to extend my appreciation to the current chair, Dr. Tara L. Lin of The University of Kansas Cancer Center. Under her leadership, CRI has increased its footprint through a range of projects, including task forces addressing CTO staff retention and improved clinical trial operations, which produced detailed recommendations and a white paper, respectively. Also during her tenure, CRI continued hosting quarterly virtual roundtable meetings for CTO medical directors; and worked with AACI's Board of Directors to develop recommendations to support the Biden administration's efforts to increase clinical trial diversity.

Enhancing Our Strengths to Achieve Our Shared Mission

Moving forward, I would like to focus on enhancing the strengths of CRI —which are clearly rooted in its membership—and of AACI as a whole: crowdsourcing the best ideas from the best people and celebrating innovation. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel when a best practice is identified, but we each work within different systems and serve different patient populations, so modifications are likely to be necessary. This spirit of collaboration and sharing is key to achieving our common mission of helping reduce the burden of cancer through clinical research.

Our collective voice is strong, and together, we can work to provide direction on the interpretation of policies, help identify where software solutions to common problems are needed or can be improved, and advocate for adequate resources to effectively carry out our mission.

This new era of cancer research represents an exciting inflection point for our cancer centers, for our research teams, and for our patients. I am excited for what we can accomplish together.

Our Mission

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) represents over 100 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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