



Bringing a Spotlight to the Influences of Social Determinants of Health

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It is my distinct honor as President Elect for the American Association of Cancer Education (AACE) to write this editorial that highlights the importance of addressing social determinants of health (SDH) in cancer education research and practice, and to invite you to our upcoming conference. The 2020 International Cancer Education Conference (ICEC), held October 14–16, 2020, in College Park, MD, USA, centers on: “Using Cancer Education to Address Social Determinants of Health” [1]. The conference, organized in partnership with three leading organizations: the AACE, the Cancer Patient Education Network, and European Association of Cancer Education, brings together multidisciplinary professionals to share transdisciplinary cancer education research, policy, and practice innovations across the cancer care continuum. Your participation in this meeting will further generate new ideas that consider “context” and transcend beyond individual factors in cancer prevention, early detection and diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and end of life.

So what are social determinants of health and why should cancer education professionals care about them? The World Health Organization (WHO) defines social determinants of health as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. Social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health

status seen within and between countries.” [2] This *powerful* definition, widely supported by leading health organizations worldwide, outlines a lofty mandate for all engaged in the health care of individuals, families, and populations. As such, the impact for the field of cancer education is significant. All involved must proactively collaborate and exchange ideas to escalate our impact.

SDH are encapsulated in all aspects of cancer health disparities across the continuum of care, across the lifespan, and across geographic and national boundaries. Our collective work to understand and ameliorate disparities associated with race-ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, language, education, health literacy, socioeconomic status, technology, immigration status and geography (rural-urban; within and between countries), culture, and structural factors, to name a few, are prime examples of how the discipline of cancer education is already deeply engaged in addressing complex social determinants of health [3–5]. The 2020 ICEC theme calls on finding new ways to innovatively and expansively address these influences of physical, environmental, political, and social conditions in our work.

The WHO established the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2005–2008) to support countries and global partners in addressing the social factors leading to ill health and health inequities, particularly among the most vulnerable people [6, 7]. In 2008, the Commission issued a decisive report titled “Who Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health: Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale.” This is an unmistakably clear and urgent call for immediate and sustained action.

We have a timely opportunity to shine a spotlight on SDH at the 2020 ICEC conference. We must also remember that SDH are complex, multidimensional, and entrenched in a long

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history of social injustice. The intersectionality (concurrent inter-play) among these factors requires that our cancer education efforts:

1. Be transformative—Our efforts must be collaborative, transdisciplinary, and paradigm shifting by tackling multiple concurrent SDH at the same time to accelerate impact—not just one social determinant at a time.
2. Be proactive and systematically apply comprehensive and expansive conceptual frameworks to inform broad contextual (everyday situational influences) to ensure relevancy and equity in outcomes.

To achieve this goal, we have available a plethora of pragmatic tools including conceptual frameworks that consider context, multi-level influences and facilitate transdisciplinary approaches in cancer education. Examples include applications of longstanding models and approaches such as the socio-ecological model [8, 9] and community-based participatory research [8, 10] and more contemporary frameworks including the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) multi-level health disparities framework [11] and the ConNECT framework [12, 13]. As illustration, NIMHD's multi-level health disparities framework [11] addresses multiple levels of influence (individual, interpersonal, community, societal) and life course domains of influence (biological, behavioral, physical/built environment, sociocultural environment, and health care system) to improve health outcomes spanning from individual to population health. The ConNECT framework on the other hand emphasizes five principles: (a) integrating context; (b) fostering a norm of inclusion; (c) ensuring equitable diffusion of innovations; (d) harnessing communication technology and other relevant technologies to improve health outcomes; and (e) prioritizing specialized training as an organizing framework [12, 13], all important tenets for addressing SDH through cancer education.

By proactively attending to multi-level contexts, diversity/inclusion and equity at all levels, cancer education research, interventions, policy, and practice efforts will assuredly contribute to addressing social determinants. The list of SDH is formidable [14], yet it brings substantial opportunities for the field of cancer education to address these complex and intractable factors in a manner that is actionable, practical, and effective to advance health equity for all [15–17].

In the 2020 ICEC conference, we have an unprecedented opportunity to spotlight cancer education efforts that enhance understanding and consideration of the influences of social determinants in health planning, programs, and evidence-based interventions. Cancer education has a critical role to foster impactful changes. We look forward to inspiring

conference presentations in College Park, MD, October 14–16, 2020.

We must take heed of wise counsel:

“Why treat people and send them back to the conditions that made them sick in the first place?” [6, 7]

– Sir Michael Marmot

I thank the 2020 ICEC organizing committee for a bold vision and courage to tackle the “elephant in the room” – social determinants of health.

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