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NATIONAL CANCER PROGRAM

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Cancer Communication in the Digital Era: Opportunities and Challenges June 13, 2014

The President's Cancer Panel commenced its 2014–2015 series of meetings on June 13, 2014, in San Diego, California, with a workshop entitled *Cancer Communication in the Digital Era: Opportunities and Challenges*. Representatives from the academic research community, government agencies, advocacy organizations, and nonprofit organizations convened to discuss ways to organize a series of meetings focused on the potential of new media, especially social and participative media technologies, to improve the control of cancer.

Presentations from selected participants highlighted opportunities and challenges related to communicating about cancer in the digital era. Internet access has increased dramatically in the United States over the past decade, creating new ways for people to find information and interact with one another. Modern communication tools provide opportunities to improve delivery of health care, improve understanding about health and health care, and enhance support for people experiencing particular conditions and illnesses. For example, providers and patients can communicate beyond traditional office settings, which can overcome geographic and temporal barriers. In addition, patients from across the world can come together to support one another in virtual support groups. Communication tools also have potential to facilitate collaboration across sectors and accelerate implementation of research findings in clinical settings. However, there are risks and challenges in communication. Inaccurate messages about cancer can be damaging when widely disseminated. For example, mass media coverage of cancer research and advertisements from medical facilities often overstate the potential impact of research findings and promote unrealistic hope for cancer cures. In addition, social media can transmit inaccuracies about vaccines and other methods of preventing diseases to a much wider audience than was possible in the past.

Workshop participants discussed several potential frameworks for a series of meetings on cancer communication in the digital era, as well as cross-cutting themes that may be relevant. These included ways new media can be used to address traditional problems in cancer control and distinct challenges and opportunities created by new media across the cancer continuum—from prevention, early detection, and diagnosis through treatment and survivorship. The potential for digital tools to enhance clinical trials participation and facilitate research was considered, as was the need to determine whether and how new media influence cancer outcomes, quality of care, and costs. Participants provided several examples of areas in which new media could be applied to improve cancer control. It was suggested that a variety of target audiences and stakeholders be considered for participation in the meeting series, including patients and families; health care providers; health care systems analysts; technologists/futurists; professional organizations; and advocacy organizations.

Results from this workshop will inform planning for subsequent meetings in the series. Findings and recommendations from the series will be presented in the Panel's 2014–2015 Annual Report to the President of the United States.