

Participant Biographies

Session 1: Progress and Gaps: Rethinking Core Outcomes for a New Era of Cancer Care



Vishal Bhatnagar, MD (Moderator)
Associate Director for Patient Outcomes
Oncology Center of Excellence, FDA

Dr. Vishal Bhatnagar is a medical oncologist and hematologist and the Associate Director for Patient Outcomes in the Office of Oncologic Diseases (OCE). His interests include patient-reported outcomes, incorporation of digital health technology in oncology trials, and real-world evidence generation. In his current role, he leads the OCE's Patient-Focused Drug Development program and is a clinical lead for the OCE's Real World Evidence program. Dr. Bhatnagar has a strong clinical interest in multiple myeloma and previously served in the Division of Hematology Products, where he participated in the approval of numerous myeloma therapies. Dr. Bhatnagar received his BA in Political Science and his medical degree from The George Washington University. He completed his internal medicine residency and hematology/oncology fellowship at the University of Maryland.



Yelak Biru
Patient Advocate

Yelak Biru has lived with multiple myeloma for more than 30 years, diagnosed at age 25. That experience – three decades on the receiving end of treatments, side effects, and trade-offs that clinical trials attempt to measure – grounds everything he brings as a patient advocate. Following CAR-T therapy, he has been in remission for over four years.

His advocacy centers on a persistent question: are we measuring what actually matters to patients? As former President and CEO of the International Myeloma Foundation, he advanced patient-centered research, global partnerships, and equitable access to care. He serves on advisory and advocacy councils across the cancer research community, including ECOG-ACRIN and Cancer Grand Challenges, and has contributed to work on financial toxicity and health-related social needs in multiple myeloma.

A technology and data leader by background, Yelak connects lived patient experience with the rigor of research and the realities of care delivery, pushing the field toward outcome measures that reflect what patients actually live through.



Sydney Barned, MD
Physician & Patient Advocate

Sydney Barned, MD is a hospitalist physician, Stage IV lung cancer survivor, and patient and research advocate who brings a unique perspective from both sides of the stethoscope. She works to ensure that lived experience meaningfully informs clinical research, drug development, and the evaluation of outcomes that matter to patients.

Her advocacy focuses on improving communication between patients and the medical and research communities, advancing equitable access to high-quality care and clinical trials, and reducing the stigma surrounding lung cancer. She is particularly interested in patient-reported outcomes and survivorship research that better captures the long-term physical, emotional, functional, and quality of life impacts of cancer and its treatment.

As a physician-patient bridge, Dr. Barning translates between clinical, scientific, and lived-experience perspectives, advocating for research that not only extends life but also better understands and improves how people live during and after cancer treatment.



Bárbara Segarra-Vázquez
Patient Advocate
University of Puerto Rico

Bárbara Segarra-Vázquez, DHSc, has been a faculty member at the University of Puerto Rico for more than 35 years and serves as Multi-Principal Investigator of the Clinical and Translational Research Education and Career Development Program at UPR (CTRECD-UPR, R25MD007607). A two-time breast cancer survivor, she is deeply committed to research advocacy, with a particular focus on increasing the participation of underrepresented populations in clinical trials. Dr. Segarra-Vázquez is the co-chair of the SWOG Research Cancer Network Patient Advocates Committee and a member of its Cancer Care Delivery Committee. She also serves on the External Advisory Panel for the Participant Engagement and Cancer Genome Sequencing (PE-CGS) Network. Previously, she contributed to the Latino Researchers Against Cancer Task Force of the Institute for Health Promotion Research at UT Health San Antonio. She is the founder and a former co-lead of the Latino Cancer Patient Advocate Training Program, an initiative dedicated to empowering Latino communities through education, representation, and advocacy in cancer research.



Valarie Traynham
Patient Advocate

Valarie Traynham is a cancer patient and research advocate, support group leader, and community engagement professional who brings the patient voice into education, research, and healthcare decision-making. Drawing from her lived experience with multiple myeloma and breast cancer, she advocates for patients to be recognized as partners in conversations about treatment, research, and the outcomes that matter in their everyday lives. She has contributed to patient-centered research initiatives, advisory discussions, and forums focused on better understanding and incorporating patient experiences and priorities into research.

Valarie is especially passionate about ensuring that patient-reported outcomes reflect the real-world impact of cancer and treatment, including quality of life, the ability to work and care for family, access to information and care, communication with healthcare teams, and whether patients feel heard. Through her advocacy and community work, she encourages researchers, healthcare professionals, and decision-makers to ask better questions and define meaningful progress through the eyes of the people living it. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time in nature, trying new recipes, and volunteering at her local cancer resource center.

Session 2: From Gaps to Goals: What Meaningful Progress Looks Like for Patients



Vishal Bhatnagar, MD (Moderator)
Associate Director for Patient Outcomes
Oncology Center of Excellence, FDA

See above entry



Jan Geissler
Patient Advocate

Jan Geissler is founder and CEO of Patvocates, a social consultancy and think-and-do tank in patient engagement across all indications, and managing director of the European Patient Advocacy Institute. He is the former director of the European Patients Academy (EUPATI).

A leukaemia patient since 2001, Jan has co-founded several patient advocacy organizations, including LeukaNET, the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC), the SML Advocates Network, the Acute Leukemia Advocates Network, and WECAN, the network of pan-European cancer patient organizations.

He is representing patients in various advisory boards and committees e.g. in committees of the European Cancer Organisation (ECO), the European Hematology Association (EHA), and the German National Decade Against Cancer.

In 2026, he was awarded with the Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for his contributions in patient engagement.



Wenora Johnson
Patient Advocate

Wenora Johnson is a three-time cancer survivor, Lynch Syndrome patient, Research and Patient Advocate, and proud U.S. Navy Veteran. Drawing on more than a decade of advocacy experience, she works to ensure that the patient voice is meaningfully incorporated into cancer research, clinical trials, healthcare policy, and patient-centered decision-making.

Wenora serves as Board President of FORCE (Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered), a Fight Colorectal Cancer Research Advocate and Clinical Trials Curator, and a member of the NRG Oncology Patient Advocate Committee. She also contributes her lived experience to research review panels, advisory committees, and clinical trial initiatives.

As a speaker, reviewer, and advocate, Wenora brings what she calls her “PhD in Personal History of Disease”, the lived expertise of a patient, to every table where decisions affecting patients are made.



Julia Maués
Patient Advocate

Julia Maues is a patient advocate dedicated to making cancer research and treatment more patient-centered, accessible, and inclusive. Diagnosed with breast cancer while pregnant in 2013, she delivered a healthy baby and soon learned the disease had spread beyond the breast. She has been living with metastatic breast cancer since then, and has personally benefited from advances driven by research and clinical trials. That experience fuels her commitment to ensuring the patient voice informs how cancer treatments are studied, dosed, and delivered.

Julia co-founded GRASP (Guiding Researchers and Advocates to Scientific Partnership) a nonprofit that connects scientists and patient advocates for meaningful collaboration and trains advocates to take part in research, including through programs such as the recent GRASP-FDA Workshop for Advocates. She also leads the Patient-Centered Dosing Initiative (PCDI), which advocates for dosing strategies that balance treatment effectiveness with quality of life. Through GRASP and PCDI, she partners with the FDA, NCI, ASCO and AACR to advance patient-focused cancer research and drug development. She serves as faculty for the AACR/ASCO Methods in Clinical Cancer Research Workshop (Vail Workshop) and speaks regularly at scientific and regulatory meetings, including ASCO, SABCS, ESMO, and the FDA.