

Patient Advocate Corner

Facilitating a Global Cancer Dialogue

Vital Options International is unique among cancer advocacy and professional organizations in its emphasis on multimedia cancer communications programs and on using cutting edge technology to communicate about cancer. Founded in 1983, Vital Options was the first psychosocial advocacy organization to address and serve the needs of young adults with cancer—those between ages 17 through early 40s.

In the 1990s, with the Internet representing the primary source of cancer support and information, concerns were growing over the quality and credibility of the information patients and their loved ones were accessing. The health care delivery system was facing dramatic change and turmoil and, at the same time, emerging research and biologic therapies were coming to the forefront, presenting new challenges in cancer communications and the doctor-patient relationship.

Bringing Doctors and Patients Together

Recognizing the void in cancer communications, Vital Options expanded its reach to people of all ages by merging cancer support and cancer information using multimedia technology as a means to advocate and bring the voices of the cancer community together. Vital Options thereby created *The Group Room* cancer talk radio show, which is produced in association with Premiere Radio Networks. The show debuted in 1996 and now, after more than a decade on the air, *The Group Room* has achieved the rare radio distinction of longevity.

Every Sunday from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm EST, listeners throughout the world tune into the syndicated show on select radio stations, XM Satellite Radio Talk 165, the Internet simulcast at www.vitaloptions.org, and by podcast through iRadioNow.com. Callers enter the discussion at 1-800-GRP-ROOM. Listeners outside of the United States may also call into the program on country-specific toll-free telephone numbers. All program, station, and call-in information is available on the Vital Options Web site.

The Group Room features noted oncologists and key opinion leaders, including researchers, oncology nurses, mental health specialists, advocates, and other medical professionals. Representatives from government and regulatory agencies are also frequent guests on the program. *The Group Room* enables physicians and callers to engage in a meaningful dialogue, leading to enhanced communication with listeners' own physicians. All shows and feature interviews are also archived on the Web site for later listening. Vital Options will provide



Left to right: John Glees, MD; Mario Dicato, MD; Selma Schimmel; James Metz, MD; Robert Comis, MD

content and archived program links to other advocacy organizations, professional societies and clinical institutions.

One of the unique features of *The Group Room* is that one can access cancer support and information in the privacy of one's home, automobile, or even a hospital. Some institutions air the program for their patients.

The Group Room regularly produces remote location broadcasts from the world's leading oncology meetings, including the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS), the Society of Gynecologic Oncology (SGO), The American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), the European Society of Medical Oncology (ESMO) and the European Cancer Conference (ECCO), among others.

Vital Options recently launched *CancerTalk*, an Internet radio show which combines the technological advances of Internet radio with visual components and medical illustrations to complement and support the physician discussion. *CancerTalk* is also archived at www.vitaloptions.org and downloadable as a document that can be printed and used as a communications tool with one's own doctor.

Vital Options International Online

Unique to Vital Options' Web site is the volume of archived content, international resources, information, and news that is available. Visitors spend an average of 40 minutes interacting on the site—far exceeding industry averages. The Vital Options International Web site has been named by

Forbes on its “Best of the Web” directory, and received the Editor’s Choice Award from OncoLink, a cancer information resource from the Abramson Cancer Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

Vitaloptions.org features a message board and provides easy access for visitors to locate national and international cancer resources and organizations, information on clinical trials, cancer news, advocacy event calendars, and professional oncology meetings. Vital Options’ Web site is also available in French and German.

While no longer exclusively limited to young adults with cancer, Vital Options maintains its commitment to this distinct patient population and plays an active role in current initiatives and programs on behalf of the growing young adult movement. Vital Options is a member of the Steering Committee of the LiveSTRONG Young Adult Alliance, maintains a dedicated site for young adults with cancer at www.youngadultswithcancer.org, and sponsors *National Young Adult Cancer Awareness Week*[®] (NYACAW), which was launched by Vital Options International in April 2003 and takes place annually the first week in April.

Everyone’s Best Partner

Considered “everyone’s best partner,” Vital Options serves as a distribution channel, working cooperatively with other advocacy organizations and professional societies to ensure the

delivery of comprehensive cancer news and information. Vital Options International encourages and welcomes communication partnerships and strategies.

Additional Vital Options projects include:

- **The Cancer NewsMinute:** Short feature news updates with information about all aspects of cancer.
- **Advocacy in Action:** Supports the efforts and the work of national and international cancer advocacy organizations.
- **The Professor & The Survivor:** A multilingual clinical trials awareness publication series.
- **Cancer Communications Surveys:** Designed to take a comprehensive look at the roles, attitudes, and needs of all parties involved in the communications process.

Vital Options International expanded to Europe in 2000 and is a recognized charity based in Paris, France. Its work is closely aligned with the American Hospital of Paris, and the Royal Marsden Hospital in London, UK.

Vital Options International is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization headquartered in Southern California. For more information please call 818-508-5657 or e-mail info@vitaloptions.org.

Selma R. Schimmel is the founder and CEO of Vital Options International. sschimmel@vitaloptions.org.



Assess and Improve Care in Your Medical Oncology Practice

The goal of ASCO’s **Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI)** is to promote excellence in cancer care by helping medical oncologists create a culture of self-examination and improvement.

QOPI practices benefit from knowledge of practice strengths and weaknesses, and access to tools and strategies to improve care. By participating in QOPI, physicians receive practice-specific data, aggregate data from their peers for comparison, and access to resources for implementing best practices. All practice-specific data are released only to that practice and are kept strictly confidential.

For info on how to join this oncologist-led initiative for assessing and improving care in medical oncology practice, visit www.ASCO.org/QOPI.

