ANCO
Educating and Empowering the Northern California Cancer Community

MOASC
Medical Oncology Association Of Southern California, Inc.

Department of Government Operations
1325 J Street, Suite 1800
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Prioritizing Oncology Patients for the COVID-19 Vaccine

Dear Director Richardson,

On behalf of the Association of Northern California Oncologists (ANCO) and the Medical Oncology Association of Southern California (MOASC) we write to thank you for your dedication to developing carefully considered and data-driven recommendations on how to distribute the COVID-19 vaccines. As you work to ensure more Californians can access the vaccine as quickly as the supply is available, we wanted to share data on the impact of COVID-19 on cancer patients and survivors. We urge you to consider including them in the highest risk priority categories, so they may receive COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible.

ANCO and MOASC represent the cancer care teams who treat the thousands of patients with cancer and survivors in California. As you make recommendations about the distribution of the vaccination, our hope is that you will consider prioritizing patients with cancer because of the compelling data that shows the increased risk to them patient of with worse COVID-19 outcomes when in active treatment or with a history of cancer. We are writing to ask you to specifically acknowledge patients with cancer and survivors as a high-risk group for developing complications and severe forms of COVID-19 and to therefore be placed in Tier 1b (or its equivalent) with expedited access to COVID-19 Vaccines.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers people diagnosed with cancer a group at increased risk of developing severe COVID-19.(1) They explicitly state that having cancer currently increases your risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

The Association for Cancer Research AACR's COVID-19 and Cancer Task Force recommended that patients with cancer should be considered for priority access to COVID-19 vaccines due to their increased risk of mortality from COVID-19 infection. The task force reviewed the available literature on fatality rates of patients with cancer who developed COVID-19 and based their recommendation on 28 peer-reviewed publications.

According to the task force's review—announced Dec. 19 and published in *Cancer Discovery*—COVID-19 fatality rates for patients with cancer were double that of patients without cancer. Even when adjusted for age, sex, and comorbidities, the mortality rates trended upward, indicating a greater risk for severe disease and mortality due to COVID-19 in patients with cancer.(2)

The American Cancer Society and the American Society of Clinical Oncology have also called on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to give patients with cancer a higher priority amid the rollout of vaccines against COVID-19. In a Dec. 18 letter to the CDC's Advisory Council on Immunization Practices, leaders at ACS and ASCO cite "compelling data that shows worse COVID-19 outcomes" in patients with cancer and people with a history of cancer.

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network® recently released guidelines for vaccination of patients with solid tumors and recommends vaccination for all cancer patients when vaccine is available.(2) They go on to specify that all patients in active cancer treatment should get immunized and go even further to state that all cancer caregivers should also be prioritized.

Currently, California's patients with cancer are not included in the California Department of Public Health's Tier 1 for vaccine prioritization. Based on the data and expert recommendations, we strongly recommend that you prioritize Californians fighting cancer such that they can have immediate access to lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines.

Please know that this issue is incredibly personal and even more urgent for patients and survivors.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Thach-Giao Truong, MD
President
Association of Northern
California Oncologists

Sincerely,

Ashkan Lashkari, MD
President
Medical Oncology
Association of Southern California, Inc.

CC: Tam Ma, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of the Governor
Richard Figueroa, Office of the Governor
Dr. Mark Gahly, Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency
Tomas Aragon, Director and State Public Health Officer, California Department of Public Health
Will Lightbourne, Director, Department of Health Care Services

1. CDC. People with Certain Medical Conditions. December 29, 2020. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html . Accessed 1/22/2021.
2. Ong MBH. Cancer groups urge CDC to prioritize cancer patients for COVID-19 vaccination. Available at https://cancerletter.com/articles/20210108_2/ . Accessed 1/22/2021.
3. NCCN. Preliminary Recommendations of the NCCN COVID-19 Vaccination Advisory Committee. Available at https://www.nccn.org/covid-19/pdf/COVID-19_Vaccination_Guidance_V1.0.pdf