

# Preface

The societal burden of cancer is one of the major public health challenges of our time. Yet that burden is not equally shared by all. Troubling disparities have been documented not only by racial/ethnic group but also by social class, insurance status, geography, and a host of other dimensions. Furthermore, such disparities represent the end result of a constellation of forces stemming from inside and outside the health care system. Many cancer disparities should be preventable.

Few have attempted to capture the breadth and depth of the dimensions of cancer disparities from both clinical as well as public health perspectives. To address this need, we present this volume to:

- broaden concepts of disparities beyond traditional discussions of race/ethnicity to explore how, where, and why they occur;
- focus on cancer disparities in the US, while citing some major examples from abroad;
- analyze certain major cancers with respect to disparities, with emphasis on socioeconomic position;
- examine the sources of disparities from both inside and outside the health care system;
- identify initial interventions that attempt to reduce and eliminate these disparities; and
- identify issues that deserve attention with respect to future research.

Our monograph addresses cancer disparities across the continuum (from prevention to mortality and by the domains of social inequality). We begin by exploring broad dimension such as definitions of disparities, data systems, the role of genes and environment, and the role of work and occupation in cancer disparities. Then we move into specific challenges in cancer disparities such as tobacco use and lung cancer, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, prostate cancer, cervical cancer, melanoma, and hepatocellular carcinoma. We then conclude with some avenues to address cancer disparities, including policy and advocacy, health

communication, overcoming barriers to cancer care, and community-based approaches. Our efforts are far from exhaustive, but they represent one of the first attempts to address cancer disparities from such a comprehensive perspective.

This volume reflects the work of a number of national experts in cancer disparities. Many are members of the Executive Committee of the Cancer Disparities Program-in-Development of the Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center. Still others are also investigators in the National Cancer Institute Community Network Program MassCONNECT (Massachusetts Community Networks to Eliminate Cancer Disparities through Education, Research and Training). Also, this volume updates and expands a earlier 2005 monograph on the topic published in the journal *Cancer Causes and Control*. All authors are dedicated to the goal of eliminating cancer disparities and I am indebted to them.

I am particularly grateful to Rachel Warren, Terra Zipoyrn Snider, and Dr. Claudia Arrigg for their unending encouragement and support. It is my hope that this monograph represents another contribution toward helping all people enjoy their highest attainable standard of health.

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