

January 24, 2017

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chair
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
United States Senate
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
United States Senate
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester:

Brave Americans who have served in our nation's military and have been diagnosed with cancer should never have to worry about timely access to the best available cancer care. Radiation therapy is one of the three major treatments for cancer along with surgery and chemotherapy. In recent years, there have been substantial clinical and technical advances in radiation oncology, resulting in new regimens with increased survival and improved quality of life.

The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) is deeply committed to improving the quality of cancer care for our Veterans and all Americans, and strongly supports the nomination of David Shulkin, MD, to be Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We believe that Dr. Shulkin's experience as VA undersecretary and as a physician executive uniquely qualifies him to accelerate necessary reforms to improve quality in the VA health system.

Under the new administration, ASTRO's experts in cancer treatment and research look forward to continuing our work with the VA, including our partnership with the VA's National Radiation Oncology Program, which oversees the development and execution of radiation therapy within the VA, on the [Radiation Oncology Practice Assessment \(ROPA\) program](#). ROPA will provide radiation oncologists at the VA with comprehensive feedback reports that show how each of their patients' diagnoses, treatments and treatment outcomes compare with national standards. Combined with the traditional cancer outcome measures of recurrence and survival, this assessment allows oncologists to see how changes in their clinical practice impact the success of each veteran's cancer treatment.

The ROPA program abstracts data from the VA's electronic medical record system into detailed feedback reports provided to VA radiation oncologists. Disease site-specific experts from ASTRO completed the first phase of the project in August 2016 by identifying quality measures for prostate and lung cancer patients.

Approximately 60 percent of cancer patients receive radiation therapy, including the brave men and women treated through the VA. ASTRO looks forward to working with Dr. Shulkin on ROPA and other opportunities to improve the quality of radiation oncology care among veterans and all cancer patients.

American Society for Radiation Oncology

January 24, 2017

Page 2

We urge swift Senate confirmation of Dr. Shulkin, and we look forward to working with him in this important role.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Thevenot". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laura Thevenot

Chief Executive Officer

CC: The Honorable Phil Roe
Chair
House Veterans' Affairs Committee

The Honorable Tim Walz
Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee

ASTRO is the largest radiation oncology society in the world, with 10,000 members practicing in both hospitals and community based centers who specialize in treating patients with radiation therapies. As the leading organization in radiation oncology, biology, and physics, the Society is dedicated to the advancement of the practice of radiation oncology by promoting excellence in patient care, providing opportunities for educational and professional development, promoting research and disseminating research results, and representing radiation oncology in a rapidly evolving health care environment.