

## Sandra M. Swain: follow your passion at work

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### Introduction

Sandra M. Swain, MD, is the current president of American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). Honored as America's Leading Experts on Adjuvant Chemotherapy & **Breast Cancer** (Breast Neoplasm), Dr. Swain has an international reputation as a leading authority both in the emergent field of inflammatory breast cancer treatment and in the treatment of early breast cancer with 28 years of medical experience and practice in Medical Oncology. Her research interests include Adjuvant Chemotherapy for, Breast Cancer and development of targeted novel agents for advanced breast cancer. She is now the Medical Director of the Washington Cancer Institute of the Medstar Washington Hospital Center and Professor of Medicine at Georgetown University.

Her topic of the keynote speech in Chinese Society of Clinical Oncology (CSCO) 2012 conference is "The treatment of HER2 positive breast cancer" (*Figure 1*). After the speech, Dr. Swain was interviewed by CCO Editor regarding her opinions on Chinese oncology study.

### Interview

**CCO editor:** As the president of ASCO, what aspects do you think CSCO needs to improve and what progress do you think Chinese Oncology research has achieved?

**Dr. Swain:** One of them is that clinical trials of newer treatments need to be increased in the Chinese population, considering the difference in metabolism and effects of drugs in different patient populations. It is important that Chinese physician investigators design and implement these clinical trials. Currently there is very low participation right now compared to that of European and US investigators.

It is obvious that the Chinese physicians are working very hard not only clinically, but also towards clinical trial as



**Figure 1** Dr. Swain was giving a lecture on "The treatment of HER2 positive breast cancer" in CSCO, 2012

well as at the laboratory. They are also working at different aspects of cancer. Together with Dr. Qin, we have also been working on "ACT China", a clinical trial course in China. So there has been a lot of progress. The first meeting was last year and second will be in 2012. We hope this will be a continuing ongoing effort.

**CCO editor:** There are more and more outstanding female doctors achieving great success in their career like you. What would you like to say to them?

**Dr. Swain:** It is very exciting to see many young women involved in cancer research and in treating patients. Many more women are going into medical school and then becoming doctors. So it is great to see many young women having this career which is important to me. I've been a mentor for young women for my whole career.

**CCO editor:** What fascinate you most of your work? And what would be your advices to those young doctors or medical students?

**Dr. Swain:** There is nothing more exciting for me than to take care of a whole person. That is why I love oncology. It is not just doing one procedure like cardiac catheterization or a colonoscopy; we treat the whole patient from the humanistic point and also look at other things like their bones and their hearts and how our treatments affect them. So I think it is very exciting, very rewarding and gratifying to be able to help people in the very difficult time in their life.

So my suggestion is to follow your passion and be excited about what you do. More young people should have their voice heard and really work with people around like their mentors and try to come up with suggestions to make it better. Realize that in cancer, we have made progress over the last decades, but still more progress needs to be made, as

the number of people with cancer will increase dramatically over the next 20 to 30 years, because as we live older, more people may get cancer.. Therefore we have to always keep it in mind that we need to make progress with every patient. We need to ask them questions, put them in trial and really investigate the tumor. I think more and more will be looking at the genes of all the tumors for every patient.

**CCO editor:** Thank you for sharing your opinions with us and thank you for your time. Enjoy your trip in China.

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