

spotlight

North Shore Hematology Oncology Associates, Suffolk County, New York



North Shore Hematology Oncology Associates (NSHOA), a comprehensive community oncology center, has been providing cancer care to the greater Long Island area of New York for more than 35 years.

NSHOA is comprised of six medical oncology offices, two radiation oncology offices, and one CyberKnife® location. With a goal of offering patients convenient access to care, NSHOA situated its offices throughout Suffolk County so that no patient would have to drive more than 15 minutes to reach one of NSHOA's treatment locations.

A Robust Service Line

The following services are available at all NSHOA locations:

- Diagnostics and PET/CT imaging
- Pathology
- Flow cytometry
- Circulating tumor cell testing
- Full chemistry diagnostics
- Tumor marker testing on patients.

Infusion services are offered at all the NSHOA medical oncology offices throughout Suffolk County. NSHOA is staffed by 16 medical oncologists, 2 radiation oncologists, 12 non-physician practitioners (including nurse practitioners and physician assistants), 52 nurses, 3 full-time nurse educators, 3 navigators, and a full-service clinical research team. Many of the physicians on staff also attend at other local hospitals, where they participate in multidisciplinary tumor boards for several disease sites.

NSHOA is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and keeps a "no appointment" policy

for emergency patients. "If a patient doesn't feel well, they don't have to do anything but come in the door. In every one of our offices we have a physician who is assigned to treat any of the walk-in patients who don't feel well either from their underlying malignancy or from their treatment," said NSHOA CEO Jeffrey Vacirca, MD. This policy has kept NSHOA's hospitalization rate very low.

Consistent, Quality Care

To meet the challenge of keeping the standard of care consistent across multiple treatment sites, Dr. Vacirca created a management team that is responsible for day-to-day operations and ensuring uniform quality of care for every patient in every office. Each week, Dr. Vacirca meets with all site managers, NSHOA's administrator, and the CFO to cover potential issues that could arise in any office, or to discuss new technologies or processes to be incorporated into practice. "We're very proactive about patient care and making the patient experience the same in every office. A lot of this we're able to do with the incorporation of technology and our state-of-the-art EMR system," said Dr. Vacirca.

Navigation & Education

NSHOA also takes a proactive approach to patient navigation. When patients call for their first appointment, the navigator schedules the patient and begins the coordination process to ensure that the patient's first visit is a productive one.

Once the patient is scheduled, the navigator then gathers all of the pertinent information for that patient's visit, such as

medical history, imaging, pathology, etc. As a practice rule, any patient diagnosed with cancer is seen within 48 hours.

"We don't want to have any burden whatsoever on the patient when they come to our office. We want them to come in and be taken care of, not running around and getting results. That, we believe, is our job," said Dr. Vacirca.

After the patient's first visit with the physician, the navigator schedules all future appointments needed including biopsies, imaging studies, follow-up appointments, and even referrals to other physicians. The goal, said Dr. Vacirca, is for patients to "leave the office not with 10 phone numbers to get things done, but with a clear, concise plan for how they're going to be taken care of."

NSHOA nurse educators also work to make sure chemotherapy patients stay on track with their treatment. Prior to treatment, nurse educators sit down with patients and go over all potential side effects and scheduling of treatment. The day following chemotherapy, every patient receives a phone call from the nurse educator checking in on how the patient is feeling. At that time, nurse educators also ensure that patients have a follow-up appointment scheduled to see their doctor within seven days of their first treatment.

Following completion of therapy, all patients can enter a survivorship program, which is also coordinated by the nurse educators.

NSHOA is currently in the process of developing a freestanding Wellness Center, which is slated to open in 2015. The Wellness Center in Stony Brook, N.Y., will be staffed by

nutritionists, psychologists, physical therapists, and additional care team members that provide complementary treatment to patients both during and after their therapy.

NSHOA also plans to open three new office locations in Suffolk County, as well as extending into Nassau County, N.Y. in 2015; two more in Suffolk County and one in neighboring Nassau County. The expansion is due to patient and physician demand. “We get a lot of calls for referrals from doctors outside of our current catchment area and really feel it’s our duty to have local treatment bases where those patients can be seen and cared for,” said Dr. Vacirca.


Personalized Medicine Program

In 2014, in collaboration with Caris Life Sciences, NSHOA established a personalized medicine program. NSHOA hopes to develop both a registry as well as prospective clinical

trials to help determine therapies tailored to each patient for possibly better outcomes and less side effects. “One size does not fit all,” said Dr. Vacirca. “We think that every patient is different and needs to be evaluated for exactly what their cancer is, and determining specifically what their treatment should be.” So far the program receives a combination of physician and self-referrals. In addition to their patient community in Suffolk County, NSHOA also sees patients from Nassau, Queens, and Brooklyn coming in for a second opinion and wanting to be a part of this novel approach.

Patient Advocacy

In 2013 NSHOA teamed up with the Community Oncology Alliance’s (COA) Patient Advocacy Network (CPAN) to launch a New York-based chapter for community cancer patient advocacy. Nicole Gregory, NSHOA’s chief commercial officer, and the

leader of the local CPAN chapter, meets quarterly with about 12 to 15 patients. In addition to being involved in legislative activities, several patients also attended the COA National Meeting in Orlando this past year and spoke about their involvement with NSHOA. 

Select Support Services

- Patient navigation
- Benefits counseling
- Survivorship
- *Look Good, Feel Better* program

Number of analytic cases seen in 2013:
6,000

