

The Helen F. Graham Cancer Center

Creating a dynamic and streamlined cancer program

The Helen F. Graham Cancer Center's grand opening in Wilmington, Del., was celebrated with an official ribbon cutting ceremony in May 2002.

Christiana Care Health System created the 60,000-square-foot, outpatient cancer center to meet a specific need for centralized, coordinated, comprehensive cancer care. Prior to the center, cancer care in Delaware—a state without a medical school—was predominantly offered in the private practice sector. Offering one-stop cancer care was the driving force behind the new center's creation, said Nicholas J. Petrelli, M.D., medical director of the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center and chair of Christiana Care's Cancer Committee.

At the center, patients see a disease-site specific multidisciplinary team—a surgeon, medical oncologist, and radiation oncologist—on their first visit.

Streamlining the approach to cancer care means that patients wait less time for a diagnosis and treatment plan. Before the center existed, patients trying to schedule appointments with the same number of specialists could wait weeks. Now, with the new multidisciplinary cancer centers, patients often have a definitive diagnosis and treatment plan within seven days.

Experienced oncology nurses head cancer care management teams that help patients navigate the continuum of care. Within the teams are a range of services—social work, nutrition, genetic counseling, rehabilitation therapy, pastoral care, psychology services, and integrated medicine—available to patients as needed.

Patient-centric Care

Conveniently located on the 189-acre Christiana Hospital campus,



(Top) A view of the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center with surrounding gardens and pond. (Bottom) Members of the Hepatobiliary Pancreatic Cancer Center multidisciplinary team at the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center.

Vital Statistics

- Total hospital bed size: 1,110 beds in two acute-care, teaching hospitals
- Dedicated cancer unit beds: 40-bed medical oncology unit; 29-bed hematology unit; 6 additional beds in hematology oncology unit dedicated to caring for patients having bone marrow and peripheral stem cell transplants
- Number of new analytic cancer cases seen per year: 2,605
- Managed care penetration in Delaware: 48 percent

Selected Patient Support Services

- Specialized programs such as meditation, relaxation, massage, hypnosis, stress management, yoga, and Tai Chi are available to patients as needed.
- The Junior Board Library offers a wide range of cancer-related materials for patients, family members, professionals, and the general public.
- The Breast Center is the area's only facility devoted exclusively to breast care, diagnosis, and treatment.
- On-site boutique, featuring wigs, prostheses, and other items for those living with cancer.

the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center is close to all hospital inpatient services, including radiology and nuclear medicine, as well as physician offices, imaging services, and the Christiana Care Breast Center.

A success from the start, the center treated 2,626 patients in its first year and has more than doubled its multidisciplinary teams. Today, Christiana Care's cancer program

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offers 13 multidisciplinary centers.

Planning for the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center included recommendations from the community, focus groups, health care professionals, and patients. The common goal was to provide state-of-the-art cancer care in a tranquil, patient-centric setting. Both patient waiting areas and medical oncology treatment stations offer views of the surrounding exterior garden and five-acre naturally landscaped pond. Soft music is often provided by community musicians volunteering their services, and more than 80 paintings donated by local artists are on display throughout the center. A virtual tour of the facility is available at www.christianacare.org.

The center's outreach efforts include innovative collaborations such as the Delaware Oncology Conferences (DOCS) program. Through the DOCS initiative, Christiana Care hosts videoconferencing between its cancer program and participating hospitals to facilitate discussion on difficult cancer cases.

Working with Beebe Medical Center, medical staff at Christiana Care recently learned how to perform intra-peritoneal hyperthermic perfusion. The procedure, used to treat advanced abdominal cancer, combines surgery to remove as much tumor as possible with an immediate infusion of heated chemotherapy. In an affiliation agreement, the two cancer centers share the costly perfusion equipment needed for the procedure.

The Young Adult Follow-Up Center is another example of unique institution-to-institution collaboration that meets specific patient needs. The program—a cooperative effort between physicians at the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center and the Alfred I. DuPont Hospital for Children—ensures continuity of care by establishing a framework to follow children who have been cured of their cancers as they grow beyond the age for treatment at the

children's hospital. As they move into adulthood, these patients are seen at the center by both adult medical oncologists and pediatric oncologists. The follow-up screening program monitors the young people for cancers that they may have an increased risk for, such as breast, rectal, and lung cancer.

Another example of the program's innovative institution-to-institution collaboration is in the area of translational research. The center is helping foster collaboration with scientists at the University of Delaware and the Delaware Biotechnology Institute with the aim of bringing clinical solutions out of the laboratory on both the cellular and molecular levels.

The center also facilitates community access to a variety of consumer-oriented cancer support organizations such as the Wellness Community, the American Cancer Society, and the Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition, among others.

An Emphasis on Research

With an accrual rate of 13 percent (six times the national average), the cancer program at Christiana Care has participated in NCI's Community Clinical Oncology Program (CCOP) for more than 15 years. Recently, NCI renewed Christiana Care's CCOP grant for five years, with an excellent priority score. The cancer program also participates in CALGB, NSABP, RTOG, COG, ECOG, and GOG.

Christiana Care holds a three-year (2001-2003) certificate of approval as a "Teaching Hospital Cancer Program" from the American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer and is one of the largest community-based teaching hospitals involved in research in the United States. The cancer program now ranks third among the top five institutions in North America that recruit the most participants for radiation therapy trials.

Efforts to boost patient accrual led the center to streamline the process of enrolling patients in clinical trials. In addition to placing research nurses in physicians' offices, the center holds "trial of the month" meetings for physicians to keep them informed of trial availability and also publishes a

physician newsletter on trial opportunities.

Among the clinical studies in which the center participates are the International Early Lung Cancer Action Program (I-ELCAP), an international study to test the effectiveness of screening individuals at high risk for lung cancer; STAR (Study on Tamoxifen and Raloxifene) for breast cancer; Proscar Prostate Cancer Prevention Trial (PCPT); and SELECT (Southwest Oncology Group Selenium and Vitamin E Chemoprevention Trial) for prostate cancer prevention.

State-of-the-Art Treatment

The cancer program at Christiana Care offers conventional, 3-D conformal therapy; intravascular, intracavitary; and interstitial brachytherapy for prostate seed implantation; adult and pediatric total body irradiation; stereotactic radiosurgery; stereotactic radiotherapy; and IMRT.

Earlier this year, the Hepatobiliary and Pancreatic Cancer Center multidisciplinary center began providing a new treatment option for patients diagnosed with liver cancer. The FDA-approved therapy known as SIR-Spheres[®] uses radioactive "microspheres," tiny ceramic or gel-like orbs that contain and emit beta radiation to attack tumors in the liver.

Currently, the cancer program has Primus linear accelerators and three-dimensional, CT-guided treatment planning. Approval from the state for a sixth linear accelerator will reduce patient waiting time for stereotactic radiosurgery or stereotactic radiotherapy even further. In the near future, the program plans to acquire a fourth high-field MRI unit with advanced perfusion-diffusion and spectroscopy techniques.

"For the first time in the state of Delaware, we have brought together high-quality physicians in the private practice setting and placed them in disease-site multidisciplinary centers to work together as patients come in for their treatment," Petrelli said. Today, the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center has approximately 6,500 patient visits each month. ■