

St. Vincent Oncology Center— A Vision of Holistic Healing

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”
—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Within the St. Vincent Oncology Center in Indianapolis, Ind., is a comprehensive cancer program designed to treat the mind, body, and spirit of patients with cancer. The \$15 million, 51,000-square-foot facility is the realization of a vision of holistic healing in a peaceful environment.

The idea for the new two-story cancer center was planted more than five years ago after an extensive planning process that involved focus groups of physicians, specialists, and former oncology patients. The driving force behind building the new center was a determination to better meet the needs of patients with cancer.

Today the cancer center sees more than 2,200 new analytic cancer patients annually. “Our program was getting bigger. The campus itself was getting bigger. It was more complicated for our outpatients to traverse to all the different areas where they get their care,” said Jean Meyer, RN, MSN, senior vice president and chief nursing officer, St. Vincent Indianapolis Hospital, and executive director of the St. Vincent Oncology Program. In the new facility the cancer program is able to serve patients in a streamlined, non-fragmented way.

Centralizing services for patients with cancer makes sense, Meyer said. “Multiple visits, multiple tests, different specialists, and so much more are done on an outpatient basis that patients were literally having to walk all over the hospital to get so many things done.”

Now patients with cancer can access all services in one location. “I think being able to put all of the services in one convenient, free-standing outpatient facility where patients can come and have all diagnostic testing and all therapy done at one place is a unique and special aspect,” said Michael Wiemann, MD, senior vice president and chief medical officer, St. Vincent Indianapolis Hospital, and medical

director of the St. Vincent Oncology Program. “And getting the doctors all together in one facility is also very helpful in increasing physician communication and interaction.”

Accredited by the American College of Surgeons’ Commission on Cancer since 1974, the St. Vincent Oncology Center recently added a new lung cancer multidisciplinary clinic, including medical oncology, surgical oncology, radiation oncology,



Visitors pass stone pillars offering an arrival and departure sequence of inspirational quotations.

Vital Statistics

- Total hospital bed size: 650
- Dedicated oncology unit beds: 44 private rooms
- Number of new analytic cases seen: 2,200
- Managed care penetration in Indiana: 18 percent

Selected Patient Support Services

- The Wellness Community—a nationwide community-based support group for patients with cancer meets at the Oncology Center
- Social workers and dietitian services available
- Non-denominational chapel and pastoral services
- Educational opportunities for patients

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gy, and pulmonology. The clinic meets monthly, and future plans include adding breast cancer and melanoma multidisciplinary clinics.

In June 2004, St. Vincent Indianapolis Hospital opened a new freestanding comprehensive Breast Center, which is located across the street from the Oncology Center. The Breast Center offers digital mammography and future plans will include a second opinion clinic and a high-risk clinic.

Holistic Care

When patients and their families come to St. Vincent Oncology Center, they enter along a walkway edged with greenery and pass under a covered portico. The portico's stone support pillars feature a series of plaques, offering an arrival and departure sequence of inspirational quotations. The quote from Oliver Wendell Holmes at the beginning of this article is one that patients and families pass by as they leave the center. These features, combined with the center's tranquil landscaping, help create an atmosphere that is calming, contemplative, and healing.

In planning the new facility, Meyer noted that "everyone looked at it not just from an architectural and construction perspective, but also with the patient in mind. When you talk about oncology patients, most people know someone who has been through the cancer treatment process and they are able to go back and say what would have made their treatment better. Everyone could personalize this concept."

An important program component that grew out of this vision of personalized cancer care was the creation of the new patient navigator position. At the St. Vincent Oncology Center, the navigator's role goes beyond helping patients find their way through the continuum of cancer care. With exceptional attention to detail and a keen awareness of patients' needs, the navigator works to smooth every step of the

care journey, to reduce barriers and frustrations, and to meet individual patient needs.

Cancer survivor Sandy Seevers is filling and defining the patient navigator role at the new cancer center.

Each day Seevers tries to greet every patient and family member (more than 400 patients and visitors per day) as they enter the building. Her desk in the main lobby features her photo and a brief job description. Near her desk are education resources and patient information including computers for patient use. Seevers personally selects and compiles information materials for patients. "People need quality [information], not quantity," she said. During the facility's design process, it was decided to provide patient resources in the main lobby instead of creating a separate patient resource library in hopes of reaching out to the greatest number of patients.

As a cancer survivor, Seevers draws on her own experience to help anticipate and eliminate problems in the care process. Seevers helps ensure that patient records get transferred, or may direct a patient to the staff member who could help with an insurance problem. For out-of-town patients, she personally visits and checks out all accommodations listed on the hospital's handout sheet, confirming prices and room quality. She also visits all the salons in the area that offer a wig service to ensure that the information she provides is accurate and up to date.

Seevers helps patients understand the range of resources available to them and facilitates their access to services. She personally visits local support groups, such as the Wellness Community, and develops one-on-one contacts to which she can refer patients. The many cards and thank-you letters Seevers receives attest to the unique and effective role she plays in the oncology center's mission of providing holistic care to its patients.

The St. Vincent Oncology Center takes special pride in the holistic spirit of the care provided. "Patients not only get all diagnostic and therapeutic services, but we also have a variety of support services. There are social workers, pastoral care workers, we have our patient navigator, we provide a variety of educational opportunities for patients,

and then there is the spiritual aspect as well," Wiemann said.

State-of-the-Art Radiology Services

Building the new cancer center involved the acquisition of new equipment and technology, as well. St. Vincent Oncology Center houses two new linear accelerators with IMRT capabilities, a CT simulator, CT and PET scanners.

In October 2003, St. Vincent became the first facility in Indiana to offer stereotactic radiosurgery, using Novalis® shaped beam technology. The hospital's NeuroOncology Program uses this procedure to perform surgery on brain and spine lesions. The Novalis technology continually shapes the treatment beam to match the size and shape of patients' tumors from all angles and minimizes damage to healthy tissue. At St. Vincent, neurosurgeons and radiation oncologists work as a cohesive team to evaluate and determine patients who would be best served by this technology.

Education and Research

The new facility features videoconferencing that ensures that tumor boards are widely accessible. The St. Vincent Oncology Center is part of St. Vincent Health, a larger, 15-hospital health-care system that serves patients across Indiana. By participating in the oncology center's tumor boards and educational offerings, staff at these outlying programs can participate in and learn about cancer care.

Between 5 and 10 percent of the cancer program's patients are enrolled in clinical trials. The St. Vincent Oncology Center participates in national cooperative group trials, as well as a number of pharmaceutical company-sponsored and in-house protocols.

"When faced with a diagnosis, people strive not only to find a treatment, but also to find peace and spiritual healing. Within the tranquil setting of the St. Vincent Oncology Center is a dedicated, professional staff providing holistic, personalized care in an environment designed to promote healing and hope," said Wiemann. "With one year of operation, patient, family, and physician satisfaction has been extremely high." ■