

PROFILE

The John Stoddard Cancer Center— Patient and Employee Satisfaction Hit High Marks

More than a decade ago, a generous \$4 million donation from local Des Moines native John Stoddard resulted in the opening of central Iowa's first cancer center on the Iowa Methodist Medical Center campus. Today, that center—the John Stoddard Cancer Center, a five-story, 28,000-square-foot outpatient facility—continues to provide cutting-edge cancer care. Although John Stoddard

passed away in 1998, his strong philanthropic spirit lives on. John Stoddard's total giving to the cancer center, including a significant bequest exceeded \$25 million. Moreover, in 2003 the John Stoddard Cancer Center received over \$250,000 in charitable gifts from more than 800 donors. Through these donations, as well as grants and fundraising events, the facility is able to deliver state-of-the-art cancer care and offer life, health, and hope to cancer patients and their families living in central Iowa and beyond.

Approved by the American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer since 1958, the cancer program is committed to improving the lives of patients with cancer through a multidisciplinary team approach. Members on the Cancer Committee represent medical oncology, surgery, radiation oncology, cancer research, pain management, oncology social work, pharmacy, pastoral care, plus much more.

"We have a very dedicated staff ranging from our healthcare professionals to our support staff. They have a genuine commitment to caring for patients with cancer that goes beyond what is learned didactically," said Mary M. Boyle, MPA, RT (R)(T), executive director of oncology. "Staff goes the extra mile to make a difference and understands that being the best is what is most important to our patients."

Satisfaction a Two-Way Street

The cancer center's environment fosters satisfaction in its employees as well as in the patients it serves. A recent employee opinion survey shows overwhelming job satisfaction (4.25 out of a possible 5) by the center's staff. In addition, a Press Ganey survey of both inpatient and outpatient satisfaction rates both exceptionally highly. Inpatient satisfaction was found to be 92.1 percent, while outpatient satisfaction was even higher at 93.9 percent. "If staff is treated well, then patients ultimately benefit too," Boyle remarked.

Iowa Methodist is well known throughout the Midwest for cancer care. Many Iowa residents travel great distances to come to the outpatient chemotherapy clinic located in the John Stoddard Cancer Center. When they arrive, they find that the clinic has been designed with the patient in mind.

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The solarium, a recent addition to the center's adult oncology unit, provides a restful place for patients and family members.

Vital Statistics

- Total hospital bed size: 709
- Dedicated cancer unit beds: 36
- Number of new analytic cancer cases seen: 1,460
- Managed care penetration in Iowa: 16 percent

Selected Patient Support Services

- Strength for Living—monthly education class for caregivers and others on chemotherapy symptom management, radiation oncology management, or dietary needs.
- US TOO™—a national support group for prostate cancer survivors and their families that offers information, counseling, and educational meetings.
- After Breast Cancer™ (ABC)—a group providing emotional, educational, and practical support to breast cancer patients and their families.
- Cancer Resource Library—information is available regarding cancer and community resources—videos, audiocassettes, books, and brochures.

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In the clinic's comfortable atmosphere, patients can choose to receive chemotherapy treatment in a private room or in an open environment in a lounge recliner where they can socialize with other patients. Cancer center patients receive advanced chemotherapeutic protocols from a highly trained and specialized staff, who are known for their great kindness as well as great skills.

State-of-the Art Radiation Services

William McGinnis, MD, medical director of the radiation oncology department, said that new radiation techniques have been proven highly effective against certain types of cancer and other recent advancements have streamlined both treatment planning and delivery. For example, the center houses the only high-dose remote afterloading brachytherapy unit in the Des Moines area.

In 2002, the center began offering IMRT, and now cancer patients no longer have to travel out of state to receive IMRT therapy. The John Stoddard Cancer Center is the only treatment facility in central Iowa to offer IMRT treatment of head and neck disease and also uses the treatment modality for primary brain lesions.

In addition, the cancer center offers the prostate seed implant treatment, which is very popular with patients who live in rural areas and prefer receiving a one-time surgical procedure of palladium 103 rather than traveling long distances for daily radiation treatment.

A radiofrequency ablation (RFA) program is also offered at the center. To enhance the quality of the RFA program, a surgical laparoscopic ultrasound unit was purchased. In addition to complementing the center's surgical RFA program, this unit also enhances the center's interventional radiography services.

The center also offers combined CT/PET and three linear accelerators.

Filling a Unique Niche

The Lymphedema Clinic at the John Stoddard Cancer Center is one of

the few such certified clinics in Iowa. Before the clinic's opening in 1998, patients had to travel more than two hours to receive such care elsewhere. "We saw a chasm for this in the community and created a program to fill that void," Boyle said.

The Lymphedema Clinic has three therapists with specialized training in lymphedema treatment techniques and management. "Lymphedema can be controlled with proper education, preventative measures, and appropriate therapy," said Nancy Fellows, PT, CLT-LANA. The program has become so popular that there is sometimes a waiting list. If a patient absolutely must be seen, however, the center works the individual into the schedule right away. The clinic also offers a preventative treatment program for post-surgical patients at risk for lymphedema.

"A new cancer center initiative this year is the start of a genetic testing and counseling program that will first focus on colon cancer and then breast/ovarian cancer," said Pati Berger, RN, OCN®, oncology research coordinator.

An end-of-life palliative care initiative is also underway at the cancer center. In 2003, the John Stoddard Cancer Center teamed up with the City of Hope National Medical Center in Duarte, Calif., to survey three groups about end-of-life care. The groups were patients with stage 3 and 4 cancers, bereaved family members, and direct caregivers. Drawing on survey results as well as other resources, the center plans to take an active approach to address end-of-life issues starting in 2004, Boyle said.

A Commitment to Research

Participating in clinical research is a major commitment of the John Stoddard Cancer Center. "The research team continuously works on developing new clinical trials in hope that someday new treatments will be developed for the most difficult cancers," Berger said. In 2002, approximately 6 percent of patients were accrued to clinical trials and a small number were also accrued to preventative trials.

For the first time, the cancer center is also participating in high-risk and low-risk ovarian screening

trials. The low-risk screening trial, which will run for four years, is a joint project with M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas. The Marie Shadur Swarzman Memorial Fund makes the low-risk trial possible. The high-risk screening trial, a joint initiative with Massachusetts General in Boston, will be conducted for three years. To date, approximately 450 eligible individuals are participating in the free screenings for the ovarian cancer trials. "The database from the ovarian trials will serve as a springboard for the breast/ovarian cancer genetic testing as well," Berger said.

Invaluable Support Services

The cancer center's executive director is extremely proud of the program's support services. "It's one thing to take care of the clinical aspects of oncology, but then we also take care of the psychological needs of our patients," Boyle said. To do so, the center provides a support referral program that is "a one-stop shop" for its patients. A physician can order oncology support services from a team comprised of a chaplain, a psychologist, an oncology clinical educator, and a dietitian.

While all of the center's support services are invaluable, the "What's on Your Mind" program, which offers free psychological counseling for cancer patients and their families, provides helpful insights to both patients with cancer and the center's staff. Diane Alber, EdD, the licensed psychologist who runs the program, points out patients and their families are interested in knowing about financial issues, pain management, and concerns related to dying. Some of the issues raised by "What's on Your Mind" participants have been "eye-opening experiences" for the center's staff, who have in turn integrated these topics into its comprehensive programs. This close bond between staff and patients is one of the cancer program's most valued traits.

"Our cancer program encompasses a holistic approach, and we strive to offer the highest standard of care," Boyle said. "At the John Stoddard Cancer Center, we firmly believe that we are in this fight together." ❧