

Healing the Body, Mind &

The growth of integrative medicine at Stamford Hospital's Bennett Cancer Center

by Fran Becker, LCSW, Elizabeth Manfredo, MS, RD, and Deanna Xistris, APRN

in-te-gra-tive med-i-cine

The practice of combining traditional scientific medicine, psychology, nursing, nutrition, exercise, physiology, and belief to enhance the natural healing capacities of the body and mind.



Music Therapy

Spirit

Science and complementary medicine share a unique relationship. Science treats and heals cancer patients so that they survive their illness. By addressing social, emotional, and spiritual needs, complementary services can help cancer patients in other ways. Research has long supported the effectiveness of using mind and body techniques to positively impact health.¹⁻³ In addition, many patients are becoming increasingly interested in holistic and complementary treatment options. The end result: a growing number of integrative cancer treatment programs.

For Stamford Hospital's Carl & Dorothy Bennett Cancer Center in Stamford, Conn., the pursuit of integrative medicine began more than a decade ago with the introduction of an art therapy program—*Expression Through Art*—that is still offered today. The program offers patients and family members the opportunity to paint, draw, and use other crafts to release stress and express how they feel about their cancer diagnosis and treatment. Today, the Integrative Medicine Program at the Bennett Cancer Center offers patients a wide range of complementary therapies in combination with conventional surgical, radiation, and chemotherapy treatments.

Growing the Program

In addition to *Expression Through Art*, the Bennett Cancer Center initially offered several other complementary services, including pain management and support groups. But in 2003 the Integrative Medicine Program underwent significant expansion. The decision was made to broaden the offerings by incorporating a number of ancient and well-respected techniques:

- Reiki, a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing
- Reflexology, the practice of stimulating points on the feet, hands, or ears
- Chair massage
- Yoga
- Tai Chi, gentle movements to reduce stress and improve balance.

In the past four years, these complementary modalities have steadily gained in popularity with people undergoing cancer treatment.



The Bennett Cancer Center's Integrative Medicine Program has four goals, namely to: 1) help reduce stress, 2) promote a positive attitude, 3) decrease pain, and 4) improve the quality of life for people with cancer and their family members. The program's philosophy is equally straightforward: to treat the *whole* person—body, mind, and spirit.

The program uses Stamford Hospital's Planetree approach to providing patient-centered care in a healing environment to help fulfill these goals. Core components of the Planetree approach include:

- A focus on the importance of human interactions
- The ability to empower patients through information and education
- The importance of human touch
- The use of complementary therapies.

Integrative medicine, by its very nature, touches on each of these areas. (For more information, see www.planetree.org.)

The Bennett Cancer Center structured its Integrative Medicine Program so that service offerings fall into one of four categories: Body, Mind-Body, Creativity, and Movement and Exercise. In addition to the full menu of complementary services listed on page 36, the Integrative Medicine Program also offers classes in stress management and individual, family, and group therapy.

Today, the program has grown to a staff of nine paid employees, who provide about 60 hours of service to between 50-100 patients each week.

Marketing and Funding

Once the program was established, attention was turned to marketing the complementary services to cancer center staff and cancer patients. The program faced a number of marketing challenges, including patients who were unfamiliar with these different modalities and their possible benefits and patients who were already overwhelmed by other information and decisions related to their cancer diagnosis and treatment. The decision was made to include information about the Integrative Medicine Program in every new patient educational packet. But word-of-mouth soon proved to be the most valuable and cost-effective marketing tool. In addition to positive patient feedback about the program's benefits, physicians and other cancer center staff often encourage patients to participate in the

SERVICE OFFERINGS

**Hands-on Healing**

- ◆ *Chair massage.* This activity helps patients release muscle tension, reduce stress, and increase blood circulation. Treatment is customized to each patient's sensitivity and preference.
- ◆ *Reflexology.* Through stimulation of reflex points on the feet, hands, or ears, reflexology helps promote relaxation and reduce muscle tension and pain.
- ◆ *Reiki.* Through gentle touch, Reiki promotes relaxation and reduces stress.

Mind over Matter

- ◆ *Meditation.* The practice of focused breathing helps to create a sense of balance and calm.
- ◆ *Hypnotherapy.* This method has patients deliberately focus on a subject or sensation to achieve deep relaxation, build a positive attitude, and help manage side effects of cancer treatment.

Express Yourself

- ◆ *Expression Through Art.* Craft, painting, and art therapy groups, as well as one-on-one sessions, are available to cancer patients and family members. A separate art therapy group is offered to children with parents or grandparents undergoing cancer treatment.
- ◆ *Sand tray therapy.* An expressive program where participants create "sand tray" tableaus, choosing from a variety of objects (both literal and symbolic) to tell their stories and express their fears, feelings, and hopes.
- ◆ *Music programs.* Music therapy is offered weekly. Drumming, sound healing, and a variety of other programs are offered throughout the year.

Get Moving

- ◆ *Yoga.* Through gentle stretching exercises, yoga strengthens muscles, increases flexibility, promotes relaxed breathing, and helps quiet the mind. Classes are specifically designed to meet patient needs.
- ◆ *Tai Chi.* Performed in a series of gentle, continuous movements, this ancient Chinese exercise is believed to improve stamina, enhance flexibility, develop muscular and cardiovascular strength, and calm the spirit.
- ◆ *Exercise & Nutrition.* This unique program is run by specially trained exercise physiologists who help patients regain strength and stamina following cancer treatment.



program. Physicians and staff receive ongoing feedback from the Integrative Medicine Program focused on patient satisfaction scores and the overall effectiveness of the program.

In addition to brochures distributed via new patient packets and word-of-mouth promotion, the Integrative Medicine Program uses the media to get the message out about its services. Local newspapers, for example, have featured stories of cancer patients who have participated and benefited from the complementary services. The program has also been featured in the cancer center's patient newsletter.

The Integrative Medicine Program makes it easy for cancer patients to participate. Each patient can take—free of charge—three sessions of Reiki, chair massage, and reflexology. Cancer patients who want to have additional sessions pay a nominal fee. Unlimited yoga and Tai Chi sessions are offered free of charge to all cancer patients.

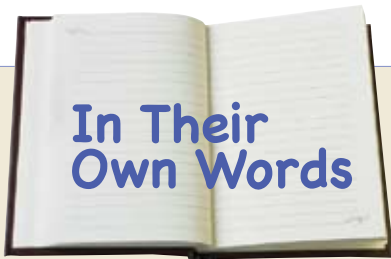
How is Bennett Cancer Center able to offer these complementary programs at no cost to its patients? The answer is simple: fundraising.

The funds needed to sustain the program are generated by annual fundraisers including the WALK, RUN & RIDE. For the past 11 years, the Bennett Cancer Center WALK & RUN has encouraged community participants to walk, run, and raise funds to support the cancer center's programs and services. Since its inception, the fundraiser has generated more than \$5.2 million for the cancer center.

The Bennett Cancer Center's RIDE event began in 1998 when a personal trainer took to the streets to raise money for a then start-up Exercise and Nutrition Program designed, in conjunction with Bennett Cancer Center staff, exclusively for cancer patients. The RIDE has grown in size and scope and has attracted hundreds of riders ever since that first solo trek, raising nearly \$800,000 for the unique program.

In 2007, the two fundraising events were combined to form one large fundraising event: Bennett Cancer Center's WALK, RUN & RIDE. The event is hosted by the Stamford Hospital Foundation, the fundraising arm of Stamford Hospital. The event's founding and title sponsor is The Ashforth Company, a diversified real estate firm in Stamford, Conn.

The art and music programs are also funded by contributions to *The Lauren Fund*. This special purpose fund was established in 1994 in memory of Lauren Leslie, a teenage cancer patient at Bennett Cancer Center and an original participant in the *Expression Through Arts* program. Addi-



In Their Own Words

Patients at the Bennett Cancer Center share their thoughts about the services offered at the Integrative Medicine Program.

"What a blessing these sessions have been. Each modality offers release, peace, and energy. Each session has given me a time of quiet inner escape and a chance to travel to peaceful, healing places. When my mind can be channeled to relax, reflect, and release, I come away with renewed optimism and energy. As my body heals, I feel more empowered and more capable of maintaining good health."

"What an incredible gift these treatments are to those of us on the journey through cancer."

"Cancer not only affects our bodies, but our dispositions as well. I attended sessions on Reiki, massage, and reflexology. They helped me to relax, reflect, and re-balance my energy. Experienced instructors helped me to re-focus and heal. Giving patients the opportunity to experience different methods of healing is a great service, lifting our spirits and healing our souls."

"These treatments have helped me more than I realized. At first, it was something to look forward to—a little treat in the midst of pain, chemo, and depression. It got me out of the house. And it made me feel better. And with each session, I feel myself getting stronger and more relaxed. I know I have a long way to go, but these treatments have certainly put me on the right path. I am making progress and it gives me hope."

tionally, cancer patients create a calendar, which is sold each year at the Bennett Cancer Center. Proceeds go directly back to the art and music programs to help benefit other patients and families.

Patient Outcomes

Soliciting patient feedback and capturing data to measure the positive effects of the Integrative Medicine Program has been challenging. One innovative method was to give patients the opportunity to express their thoughts about the program in a "journal" format. The Integrative Medicine Program encourages patients to provide feedback using this "open" yet still "anonymous" way. (See box above to hear what participants have said about how the program has affected their lives and their healing process after cancer.)

In 2006, the Integrative Medicine Program developed a study to quantify the quality-of-life impact these complementary services had on four primary life domains. Consistent with the FACT-G research measure, these areas included:

1. Physical well-being (i.e., energy, nausea, pain, etc.)
2. Social and family well-being (i.e., emotional support from family and friends, family communication, closeness with others)
3. Emotional well-being (i.e., sadness, nervousness, worry)
4. Functional well-being (i.e., ability to work, sleep, enjoy life).

Study findings concluded that a cancer patient's quality of life can be enhanced by the addition of complementary services to the primary, traditional chemotherapy, radiation, and surgical treatments. Specifically, the study found that:

- The pre- and post-treatment measurements are significantly different based on the emotional and functional well-being of the patient.
- Reiki treatment outperformed the other modalities and

seemed to be the most beneficial as it impacted on all four domains.

- Reflexology, which came in second position, seemed to improve the emotional and functional traits of the well-being of patients.

Further studies are necessary to confirm these results and to properly quantify the impact of these treatments on participants.

Demand for these complementary services varies, depending on the patient's needs as well as his or her willingness to participate in activities outside of conventional treatment. For some patients, radiation or chemotherapy treatment consumes so much of their time and energy that they cannot imagine spending additional time at the Cancer Center—even if it is for a chair massage or Reiki session. Those patients who do invest the time and energy, however, are almost always pleased with the result. 🧘

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