

Carson Tahoe Cancer Center in Carson City, Nevada
Caring for the community with centralized, comprehensive services

For many residents of rural northern Nevada, spectacular views of the snowcapped Sierra Mountains and breathtaking scenery are the backdrop of everyday life. Living in rural areas, however, often comes at a price: less than easy access to a full range of healthcare services and the need to travel long distances to receive care. This scenario may be especially true when specialized services are needed over an extended period of time.

Fortunately for people living in northern Nevada, the opening of the Carson Tahoe Cancer Center in 2006 brings centralized comprehensive cancer care to the campus of the new Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center, constructed in 2006. The Carson Tahoe Cancer Center is the only freestanding program in the state to receive ACoS Commission on Cancer accreditation with nine commendations, including excellence in outreach, clinical trial accrual in partnership with the University of Colorado, and 95 percent compliance with adoption and monitoring of national guidelines. Carson Tahoe Regional Healthcare President and CEO Ed Epperson has called the new Cancer Center the “jewel” of the new medical campus.

Designed to Enhance the Patient Experience

In designing the \$12 million, 35,000-square-foot freestanding facility care was taken to create an atmosphere of peaceful healing, incorporating serene views of the surrounding Eagle Valley. Prior to the new center’s opening, cancer services had been spread throughout the community. Now, in the new two-story facility, a full range of oncology treatment services are under one roof.

Visitors arriving at the main entrance walk into a spacious, tran-
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The parlor of the new Cancer Resource Center (above) was carefully designed to retain the cozy welcoming atmosphere of the Adams House cottage (at right), the Cancer Resource Center’s previous home.



Vital Statistics

- Licensed hospital beds: 144
- Designated inpatient cancer unit beds: 32
- Number of new analytic cases seen in 2006: 626

Selected Patient Services

(These services are provided free of charge.)

- Award-winning Cancer Resource Center, including library, support groups, and more
- THiNK PiNK® breast cancer

awareness community event

- Mammovan
- Casting for Recovery® annual fly-fishing retreat for breast cancer survivors
- Reel Recovery® annual fly-fishing retreat for men with cancer
- Look Good, Feel Better and other American Cancer Society programs
- Yoga, massage therapy, and Healthy Healing exercise program for cancer survivors

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE CARSON TAHOE CANCER CENTER

quill lobby infused with natural light. A central two-sided stone fireplace and comfortable seating create a cozy ambience in the waiting area. On the north side of the main floor are the program's unique Cancer Resource Center and the Cancer Services offices, including the cancer registry, the program administrator's office, and the clinical trials and community outreach office. On the southside, across the lobby, are a two-physician medical oncology practice and the hospital-based ambulatory infusion center. Also on this floor is a conference room, where the cancer committee, IRB, and weekly multidisciplinary cancer conference meetings are held. The cancer conference team includes medical and radiation oncologists, surgeons, radiologists, pathologists, and other healthcare professionals who review recently diagnosed cases.

A wide staircase leads to the downstairs lobby area, which also features a double-sided fireplace. Here Radiation Oncology services are located, including space for a five member radiation oncology private practice, five radiation therapists, two dosimetrists, and two physicists. Two linear accelerators are used to treat up to 60 patients per day. Treatment options include IMRT for prostate and head and neck cancers and 3-D conformal radiation treatments. Brachytherapy is available at the Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center.

The Little Resource Center That Grew

In many ways, the story of the Carson Tahoe Cancer Center goes hand in hand with the story of the program's unique Cancer Resource Center. More than 15 years ago, when hospital employee Ann Proffitt was fighting her own battle with cancer, she noticed a lack of readily available educational and resource materials for cancer patients receiving care at the hospital. With the help of a physician champion, she approached the hospital administration to ask whether some pamphlets and informational materials could be gathered together for patients diag-

nosed with cancer. Recognizing the need, in 2000, the hospital dedicated a small arts and crafts cottage, known as the Adams House, as the Cancer Resource Center. A library was created; furniture and office equipment were purchased with monies allocated by the hospital trustees. Before the centralization of cancer services in the community, the Resource Center served as a valuable hub of information, providing educational materials, support services, and financial counseling, and became home to the office of Cancer Services that helped coordinate patient care.

As the Resource Center grew, so did its staff. Working under Carla Brutico, RN, OCN, manager of Cancer Services, Ann Proffitt is now the Resource Center's FTE supervisor with one paid assistant and a volunteer staff of 8 to 10 cancer survivors. Ann's volunteer staff not only go through the hospital's volunteer training program, they go through Ann's training program for working with cancer patients. Before long, the Adams House took on special meaning for patients and families. "Patients would walk in full of anxiety...and they would walk into this darling cottage that was so non-clinical. Immediately you could hear an exhale of breath, because this isn't threatening. This is comforting, and nurturing, and tells them—we've been there, done that, and you can do it too, and we are going to show you how," Brutico said. In 2001 and 2002, this exceptional resource program received national awards from the NCI for the patient education and empowerment programs.

The story of how the Cancer Resource Center transitioned into the new building demonstrates just how seriously Carson Tahoe Cancer Center listens to the community it serves. Patients and families had come to associate the cozy Adams House cottage and its physical setting with the Cancer Services program. Recognizing this, the hospital asked the architects for the new cancer center to hold some of their planning meetings in the Adams House. In designing the new Cancer Resource Center, the architects were asked to re-create some of the architectural components of the arts and crafts Adams House. The result is an area that is distinctly different from the

rest of the new facility. The cottage's glass and woodwork cabinets were re-created in the new Resource Center; the same homey mission-style furniture welcomes visitors in the new space. Most important, all of the patients' mementoes and every piece of wall art are on display at the new Resource Center along with three specially commissioned watercolors of the Adams House. A separate entrance was created so patients can walk directly into the new Resource Center without having to go through the clinical areas of the Cancer Center. Brutico says community response to the new facility has been overwhelming.

In December 2006, the Cancer Center celebrated the addition of another valuable community resource with the opening of the Merriner Cottages. Funded through a generous \$2 million donation from the Merriner Family Trust, the 15 double occupancy units adjacent to the Cancer Center provide free housing for rural cancer patients and their families that meet geographic and financial need criteria.

More to Come

With a focus on healing the whole patient, the Cancer Center's multidisciplinary cancer committee is working to identify those evidence-based and peer-reviewed integrative oncology therapies that may work best for its community. Currently, the program is offering healing massage therapy and yoga classes. Patients, families, and the community can enjoy a contemplative meditation labyrinth constructed on the grounds by the Cancer Center. The design, 35-feet in diameter, was created by an internationally known artist; construction was made possible by a generous donation from the Carson City Rotary Club. Additional outdoor areas include a patio adjacent to the south wall of the Cancer Center.

The Cancer Center outreach program, which is staffed by an FTE oncology nurse, travels out into the community to address service groups, church groups, and other community organizations on cancer-related topics. Each year a mammovan is hosted on site, offering no-cost or low-cost mammograms for those that qualify. 📍