

# Giving Back to the Community

*The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing  
at Central Maine Medical Center*

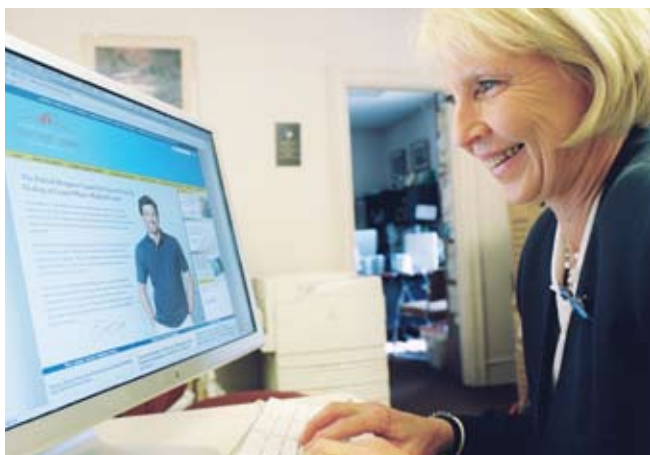
**by Kerry Irish, LCSW, OSW-C, and Rita Molloy**

The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing at Central Maine Medical Center is dedicated solely to meeting the needs of cancer patients and their family members. An equally important goal: to reach out to underserved populations in an effort to improve access to care and cancer screening and prevention efforts (see box on page 38). Here is a look at this innovative supportive care program from its conception to its opening this year.



The Center provides professionally facilitated support groups both at Central Maine Medical Center and in outlying communities.

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The Center's website is a source for reliable information about cancer as well as highlighting programs and services available through the Center.

Patrick Dempsey, the well-known actor who currently plays a physician on the television show, *Grey's Anatomy*, grew up in central Maine, and his mother received cancer care at Central Maine Medical Center. During her illness, the family relied heavily on Dempsey's sister, Mary, a medical secretary and patient access specialist who has worked at Central Maine Medical Center for more than 25 years, to help them navigate the complexities of the healthcare system. In an effort to give back to the cancer care team and the community that helped his mother, in early 2007, Patrick and Mary approached Central Maine Medical Center about the possibility of supporting an expansion of support services for individuals with cancer.

### Putting the Team Together

Central Maine Medical Center formed a steering committee comprised of hospital administrators, oncology program staff, key physicians, development staff, and Mary, as a representative of the Dempsey family, to explore and discuss the needs of cancer patients and caregivers in the Central Maine region. The first step involved the cancer center's outpatient oncology social worker compiling data that had been collected over the past four years from an initial patient needs survey tool. Based on the NCCN's distress screening tool and problem checklist,<sup>1</sup> this survey is given to all new oncology patients at Central Maine Medical Center's Comprehensive Cancer Center. The oncology social worker also conducted an informal needs assessment and focus group with members of the Cancer Wellness & Support Group

to assess their perceived information and support needs. Finally, the program's oncologists, key physicians who work with cancer patients, and two rural oncology clinic managers were asked to provide input into the supportive care needs of cancer patients and their family members.

Within months, the findings of the steering committee coalesced into the development of a cancer resource and education center housed on the campus of the Central Maine Medical Center, with satellite services provided in the oncology clinics of two rural Critical Access Hospitals. The steering committee and the Dempsey family agreed that creating a strong web-based component to the new program was critical. Why? Because while some cancer patients and families who live in the Central Maine catchment area are not able to travel regularly to the Dempsey Center or the outlying oncology clinics for Center programs and services, virtual services provided through a website are *always* available to those with Internet access.

To that end, Central Maine Medical Center established a website development committee, comprised of medical librarians, communications office staff, and oncology professionals. This group developed a blueprint and content (and/or contracted with other reliable sources for cancer information) for the original website, then worked with website designers and programmers to launch an attractive, easily navigable site in time for the Center's opening. At present, the website serves mainly as a source for reliable information about cancer—the 3D Cancer Atlas videos, which provide information about different types of cancer, treatment, and procedures are an especially popular feature—as well as highlighting programs and services available through the Center. Further website development plans are in progress.

In addition to the steering committee, the Central Maine Cancer Center also put together a Professional Advisory Committee composed of individuals who live and/or work in Central Maine, including at least two members each from the Bridgton and Rumford communities. Committee membership includes at least two cancer survivor(s) and/or family caregiver(s), and a balanced representation of relevant professional disciplines, including:

- A physician
- A clinical psychologist
- An oncology social worker
- An oncology nurse
- A chaplain, clergy member, or pastoral care associate
- A medical librarian
- A radiation therapy professional
- A representative from Central Maine Medical Center's administration
- Patrick Dempsey (who actively participates in each meeting by conference call).

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## Reflections from Mary Dempsey

When my mom was first diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1997, it was, of course, a shock to all of us.

I have been in the medical field for over 28 years now. After speaking with my mom and her doctors, I quickly went into high gear gathering all the information I could to help mom, and our family, better understand what was ahead of us. I had to dig for information and ask a lot of people.

We had made it through almost two years when the cancer recurred. This time, we had resources to refer to, which really helped. We found that having information about the cancer and our treatment options, along with great doctors and healthcare professionals, makes a big difference. I continued to search for the latest information through a variety of resources online, through books, and by speaking with the professionals I worked with. It was fortunate for my mom and our family that I have the skills to navigate through this complex process.

Even after our family had completed round three of cancer treatment, I still didn't realize how being a patient navigator would and does affect the family in a positive way.

Patrick had been working out West as a spokesperson for cancer, and wanted to do more to give back to the community where he grew up. Patrick called me one day and asked, "**What are the needs of the community, in reference to cancer?**"

I told him I was sure there were many but would do some research and get back to him. I contacted Kerry Irish, LCSW, OSW-C, who has worked in the oncology field for years and is very knowledgeable and well respected. At that time, Kerry was an outpatient oncology social worker at Central Maine Medical Center. I told her our story and asked for her help.

She was very happy to be involved. Together we started a year-long process of putting a plan together along with Patrick's input to help enhance the programs at Central Maine Medical Center that were already running well, as well as to build a new patient and family resource center. With Patrick's support, the support of Central Maine Medical Center, and now the support of The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing, we are able to help provide patients, family members, and caregivers with valuable, much-needed information.

When facing cancer, I believe great resources and support are very important. The support can either come from many places—your family, your friends, co-workers, or an innovative resource program like The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing.



**The Dempsey family at the opening of the Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing. (Not pictured, sister Alicia Hatten.)**






Dempsey Center staff (pictured from left to right): Emily Ecker, outreach oncology social worker; Carol Brewster, patient services representative; Kerry Irish, program director; Mary Dempsey, center coordinator.

### *Central Maine Medical Center At-a-Glance*

Central Maine Medical Center is a 250-bed tertiary facility and Level II Trauma Center that provides healthcare services, training for health professionals, and clinical research opportunities across a huge region of western and central Maine, an area that is predominantly rural and economically depressed. Collectively, the primary and secondary tertiary hospital service area extends from upper Franklin County in the north, to upper Cumberland County in the south, west to New Hampshire, and east to the coast. Under the organizational umbrella of Central Maine Healthcare, Central Maine Medical Center is affiliated with the Central Maine Heart and Vascular Institute, the Central Maine Medical Center College of Nursing and Health Professions, and two rural Critical Access Hospitals (Bridgton Hospital and Rumford Hospital).

Among Central Maine Medical Center's many specialties is cancer care, provided under the umbrella of the Comprehensive Cancer Center. The Center provides a wide range of services to area cancer patients, including diagnostic, treatment, support, end-of-life, and information services. Through its research relationship with the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, the Cancer Center also provides opportunities for cancer patients to participate in cutting-edge oncology clinical trials.

The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing at Central Maine Medical Center is the newest service line within a healthcare system with a long history of providing innovative and compassionate healthcare services. 

### **Our Mission Statement**

The mission of The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing is to provide the highest quality of education, support and wellness services to enhance the quality of life of individuals, families, and communities touched by cancer. We strive to embrace the whole person, including body, mind, and spirit, in a respectful, inclusive, and healing environment.

This group helped guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation process of the Center's programs and services. The Professional Advisory Committee began meeting in January 2008, and accomplishments to date have included the development of the Center's mission statement, as well as a priority slate of program and service goals and ideas (many of which have already rolled out).

The committee recently reviewed the brief of the Institute of Medicine's report *Cancer Care for the Whole Patient: Meeting Psychosocial Health Needs*,<sup>2</sup> and discussed how the mission and services offered at The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing and its larger institution, Central Maine Medical Center, align with the report's recommendations, and how to continue to refine and improve the psychosocial care of cancer patients and their caregivers.

### *The Birth of the Center*

Development on the entire project proceeded quickly over the course of 14 months, and with a generous seed donation from Patrick Dempsey, The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing opened its doors on March 31, 2008. Located on the campus of Central Maine Medical Center, The Dempsey Center provides support, education, and health promotion for those touched by cancer. Its warm, inviting environment includes a cancer resource library with a dedicated computer station for cancer patients, family members, and the general public, to access vetted online cancer resources. The Dempsey Center also features an integrative medicine treatment room, and dedicated space for cancer support group meetings and educational programs. Other services include:

- Professionally facilitated cancer and caregiver support groups both at Central Maine Medical Center and in outlying communities.
- Integrative medicine programming and classes, such as therapeutic massage services, yoga, qi gong, and more.
- A toll-free Cancer Assistance Line providing information about local, state, and national resources and services for those living with cancer.
- A dedicated outreach oncology social worker to provide counseling, case management, support groups, and educational programs in the outlying rural communities where people are often underserved.
- Community health education offerings on cancer-related topics, such as a recent, well-attended public screening of the film, *The Breast Cancer Diaries*, and panel discussion with breast cancer patients and experts.

Nearly all services of The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing are free of charge. Some integrative medicine services (massage therapy, for example) require a very modest fee for service, based on a sliding

## Serving Maine's Underserved

The primary service area of Central Maine Healthcare is Androscoggin, Oxford, and upper Cumberland counties in the western and central part of the state. The predominant census designation of the towns in the service area is rural or exceptionally rural, with a very few minor urban clusters, and one urbanized area, the twin cities of Lewiston/Auburn, whose combined 2008 estimated census is now around 62,000.

Transportation in the region has always been considered a barrier to care for those who cannot afford a car, the cost of gasoline, or the price of hiring someone to transport them. A round trip to and from Central Maine Medical Center from within this area can entail up to 100 miles of driving over poor east-west secondary and rural roads. Public transportation in the region is virtually non-existent and volunteer transport and small regional call-for-service organizations are spread thin.

Central Maine Medical Center's service area includes both an insured working population and a large subset of poor, uninsured, aging, and chronically ill. The population in Maine, as in other parts of the country, is aging. Over the next decades the Baby Boomers will continue to join the current elderly in record numbers, entering the prime years for developing chronic and other illnesses, including cancer.<sup>1</sup> In 2004, people aged 45 and older represented 39 percent of Maine's population. By 2025 this segment will rise to 47 percent. Those aged 65 and older will rise from about 14 percent to 21 percent.<sup>2</sup> In the Lewiston/Auburn area alone, 17.8 percent of the population is age 65 or older, as compared to 14.4 percent for Maine and 12.4 percent for the U.S.

fee scale. Current funding for services and programs comes from Mr. Dempsey's initial donation, support from Central Maine Medical Center, and other philanthropic sources, including donations from the public. Future development opportunities, including grants and fundraising events, are being explored.

### Future Directions

As interest in The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing grows, the program is fielding many requests for additional programs and services, including expanded integrative medicine offerings, direct patient financial assistance programs, and services for post-treatment cancer survivors and their family members.

With a small staff (a Program Director, Center Coordinator, an Outreach Oncology Social Worker, and a part-time Patient Service Representative) and a large mission, The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing strives to achieve funding levels that will support the provision of additional programs and services, while also using existing resources, such as oncology program staff, the Professional Advisory Committee, and a growing pool of capable and enthusiastic volunteers, to meet initial program goals. In the future, The Patrick Dempsey Center for

During the period 2004-2005, 124,000 Mainers did *not* have health insurance. The majority of these were adults, and half of them were from low-income families.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, research has shown that nationally, "rural families, particularly those living in counties not adjacent to urban counties, are more likely to have an uninsured member (33 percent of rural non-adjacent families versus 28 percent urban), and to have all members uninsured (9 percent rural non-adjacent versus 6 percent urban)."<sup>4</sup>

Our reality: patients come from a predominantly rural area that suffers from a lack of cancer support services. Unfortunately patients in the outlying rural clinics still have very limited access, if any, to face-to-face cancer support groups, and no access to professional oncology social work or cancer patient navigation services. The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing is working to change that reality. 📍

### References

<sup>1</sup>Bureau of Health, Maine Dept. of Human Services. *Healthy Maine 2010*. Maine Dept. of Health and Human Services. Available online at <http://www.maine.gov>. Published December 2002. Last accessed October 2, 2008.

<sup>2</sup>Lachance L. The face of aging in Maine. [PowerPoint presentation] presented at: Building Alliances for Healthy Aging Conference. Laurie Lachance, Maine State Economist. Sept. 24, 2004; Augusta, Maine.

<sup>3</sup>Cook A, Miller D, Zuckerman S. *Health Insurance Coverage in Maine 2004-2005*. The Urban Institute. Available online at [www.urban.org/publications/1001089.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/1001089.html). Last accessed June 25, 2008.

<sup>4</sup>Maine Rural Health Research Center. *Rural families more likely to be uninsured and have different sources of coverage*. Research and Policy Brief, June 2007. Available online at <http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/Publications/rural/pb34.pdf>. Last accessed June 25, 2008.

Cancer Hope & Healing plans to launch a Patient Financial Assistance Counseling program to help cancer patients manage financial difficulties. The Patrick Dempsey Center for Cancer Hope & Healing is also hoping to expand its transportation assistance program, to help patients overcome the significant barriers that can prevent access to a workup and treatment for cancer. 📍

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### References

<sup>1</sup>Distress: Treatment Guidelines for Patients. NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines. National Comprehensive Cancer Network and American Cancer Society, 2004. (Version III, Jan. 2008, is available online at [http://www.cancer.org/downloads/CRI/NCCN\\_Distress\\_Guidelines\\_2008.pdf](http://www.cancer.org/downloads/CRI/NCCN_Distress_Guidelines_2008.pdf) Last accessed October 2, 2008.)

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Medicine (IOM). 2007. Cancer care for the whole patient: Meeting psychosocial health needs. Nancy E. Adler and Ann E. K. Page, eds. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press. Available online at [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=11993](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11993). Last accessed June 25, 2008.