

The Cancer Center at Lowell General Hospital, Lowell, Massachusetts

Where comprehensive, multidisciplinary care brings outstanding patient satisfaction

With cancer care, the patient's experience and that of their family and caregivers can be as important as the clinical treatment they receive. Knowing this, Lowell General Hospital created its community cancer center in 1998, committed to providing the most innovative care in a comfortable and convenient setting—meeting the clinical and emotional needs of all affected by a cancer diagnosis. Eight years later, in 2006, the Cancer Center at LGH was ranked number one in the state of Massachusetts for overall patient satisfaction, according to Press Ganey Associates. Claudia Rupp, RN, director of Cancer Services, points out that patient satisfaction is a hospital-wide initiative, part of the staff's commitment to becoming the best community hospital in America. The program's exceptional patient satisfaction scores are the result of "teamwork, caring, and our excellent staff," she said. "Our motto at Lowell General Hospital is 'Patients First in Everything We Do'. Caring for the oncology patient takes a team. We are not just caring for the individual but for the whole family."

Located on the grounds of Lowell General Hospital, the Cancer Center provides care for adults with all types of cancer. In 2007, the program had more than 32,000 patient visits. Leading cancer sites are lung, prostate, breast, bladder, and colon/rectum.

Accredited by the American College of Surgeons (ACoS) Commission on Cancer (COC) since 1990, and an ACCC member since 1999, the Cancer Center at LGH received American College of Radiology (ACR) certification in 2005. In 2008 ACoS awarded the Cancer Center three-year re-accreditation with Commendation as a Comprehensive Community Cancer Program. "Our ability to provide this multidisciplinary scope of comprehensive care and being recognized for it by the Commission on Cancer is the



The Cancer Center's infusion area, redesigned in 2007, features both private and open infusion areas.

Vital Statistics

- Total hospital bed size: 214 licensed beds
- Dedicated inpatient cancer unit beds: 13
- Number of new analytic cases per year: 850

Selected Patient Support Services

- Nutrition Services
- Patient assistance program
- Breast Health Patient Navigator
- Lymphedema Clinic
- Interpreter services
- Pastoral care

direct result of our continued commitment to patient care at every level," said Murat Anamur, MD, medical director of the Cancer Center.

A Collaborative Culture

Situated a mere 35 miles from Boston—with the country's largest NCI-designated comprehensive cancer program nearby—the Cancer Center at Lowell General Hospital succeeds in providing Boston-quality care locally, offering the greater Lowell community access to state-of-the-art

treatment close to home. By developing collaborative relationships to best serve its patients and the community, the Cancer Center focuses on quality, helping streamline patient access to care, and providing standards of care equal to that in the region's tertiary care centers. One aim of these collaborative relationships is to create a seamless experience clinically for patients should they need to travel outside LGH for coordinated care. "Our medical oncologists, our radiation oncologists, our primary care

physicians, and surgeons will work collaboratively with the Boston tertiary care centers for complex cases. We welcome the referral patterns,” said Rupp. At the same time, the Cancer Center has developed programs that bring specialized care services back home to the community, developing onsite multidisciplinary clinics for which Boston-based physicians travel to Lowell General. These include a Thoracic Lung Clinic and a Cancer Risk Assessment Clinic, both in partnership with physicians from Massachusetts General Hospital; and a GYN/Oncology Clinic in which physicians from Brigham and Women’s Hospital participate.

All Services under One Roof

The outpatient Cancer Center is housed in a freestanding three-story building that is linked to the main hospital via an underground tunnel. Arriving through the Cancer Center’s main entrance, visitors come into a spacious reception area that boasts a tranquil waterfall. The ground floor includes radiation oncology services, where a comfortably furnished reception area includes a coffee station and refreshments for patients and caregivers, two linear accelerator rooms, the Cancer Center Boutique, and a satellite lab. Medical oncology services are located on the first floor. A patient and family resource room, social work, clinical research, infusion room, and cancer services administrative offices are also found here. When the new Cancer Center was constructed a decade ago, the plans included shell space on the second floor that would allow for future program growth and expansion. In 2007, that space was converted into a 10,000-square-foot expansion of the medical oncology physician practice, cancer registry, and additional conference space. This allowed a redesign of the infusion room which now features 12 chairs in an open infusion area and 7 private treatment areas. Adjacent to the infusion room is a dedicated oncology pharmacy staffed by full-time PharmD-prepared oncology pharmacists and full-time

oncology-registered technicians. Relocated to the second floor are the medical oncologists’ offices, treatment and evaluation rooms, space for private consultations with specialists providing GYN and thoracic consultations, the family and caregiver conference room, a conference room for children’s support services, social



A meeting of the Cancer Center’s multidisciplinary tumor board.

work services, video conferencing facilities, and a PET scan suite.

Clinical Evolution

The Cancer Center’s multidisciplinary tumor board meets twice monthly and each month features a consulting physician from Boston. Tumor boards are attended by the multidisciplinary team providing cancer care, including medical oncologists, surgeons, primary care physicians, pathologists, radiologists, and clinical support staff. In addition, the Cancer Center at Lowell General offers disease-site specific multidisciplinary clinics for breast, prostate, thoracic, urologic, and ENT cancers. Patients scheduled for a multidisciplinary consultation meet with a team of care specialists, which may include a breast health navigator/nurse practitioner, nurse, medical oncologist, radiation oncologist, surgeon, social worker, and oncology nurse. Depending on the patient’s diagnosis, the team may also include a pulmonary specialist, urologist, radiologist, and pathologist. The team reviews the patient’s diagnosis and develops a comprehensive treatment plan for continued care.

The Cancer Center at LGH offers state-of-the-art treatment modalities including IMRT, two linear accelerators, and a prostate seed implant program. In 2008 LGH began offering the da Vinci® Surgical System through

its GYN/Urological surgical program. Diagnostic radiology services include chemoembolization, stereotactic biopsies, ultrasound, breast MRI, and onsite diagnostic PET imaging. The Cancer Center accrues approximately four percent of its analytic cases to clinical research. As an affiliate member of Dana-Farber Partners Cancer Care, patients at Lowell General’s Cancer Center have access to those clinical research studies that are open to Dana-Farber Partners affiliate sites.

Caring for the Whole Patient

Ensuring patients the personal touch, the cancer program at LGH offers an extensive range of supportive care services. Social work services are provided by two dedicated master’s-prepared social workers who organize and facilitate support groups for patients, family members and caregivers, and the children of patients with cancer. The Patient Family Resource room, located on the first floor, is open to patients, family members, staff, and the community and features a lending library of more than 400 books and videos as well as laptops, Internet access, and video and DVD players for onsite use.

Among the mind/body supportive care offerings are guided imagery, meditation, Reiki, Yoga of the Heart, and a mindfulness-based stress reduction program, as well as innovative therapeutic programs. All are provided to patients free of charge.

For nearly a decade, the Cancer Center’s Patient Assistance Fund has helped patients in need with goods, services, or financial assistance. The fund was created thanks to TeamWalk for CancerCare, which will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2009. Last year, TeamWalk raised more than \$570,000 for the Cancer Center at Lowell General. All the funds raised are dedicated to the Cancer Center.

“Over the years, we really listened to the community and what they wanted in a cancer center. We included the community in the design, development, and planning. The availability of locally provided quality healthcare is important to our community, and we are committed to providing that quality cancer care close to home,” Rupp said. ☐