

Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

In Baton Rouge 38 years ago a group of community organizers, led by community leader Anna Lipsey and surgeon Jack Rathbone, helped found a community-based organization focused solely on cancer care. An overriding goal was to provide high-quality services to patients regardless of their ability to pay. Today Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center (MBP) is not only a leader in providing state-of-the-art radiation therapy to communities in southeast Louisiana, it is bringing screenings and early detection programs, education, and research into the communities it serves. Through a series of innovative partnerships, MBP is succeeding in its mission “to improve cancer survivorship and lessen the burden of cancer through expert treatment, compassionate care, early detection, research, and education.” No small feat in a state with such disproportionate cancer mortality rates. Although cancer incidence rates in Louisiana are comparable to national averages, the state has one of the highest death rates from cancer in the country. These rates are largely attributed to the fact that many Louisianians have limited access to prevention, early detection, and treatment services. Simply put, the diagnosis of cancer comes too late. Mary Bird Perkins is working to change that.

Innovative Partnerships

Because of the complexity and costliness of providing state-of-the-art cancer services, Mary Bird Perkins’ cancer-only focus enables it to be a “catalyst and organizer that expands access to multidisciplinary screenings, cancer detection, and diagnosis and treatment programs emphasizing long-term survival and quality of life,” said Todd Stevens, president and CEO of Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center.

Through innovative partnerships MBP jointly operates two ACoS-



MBP’s Early Bird mobile medical clinic serves an 18-parish region.



As part of the MBP-LSU Medical Physics Program, John Gibbons, PhD, chief of clinical physics, (second from the left) works with students to assess a patient’s treatment plan.

Vital Statistics

Number of newly diagnosed patients in 2007: More than 2,400.
In 2008, MBP provided 47,000 treatments and 660 special procedures.

Selected Support Services

- Early Bird mobile medical clinic
- Patient navigation services in partnership with Our Lady of the Lake for colorectal cancer and Woman’s Hospital for breast cancer
- Oncologic dentist services for head and neck patients
- Dietitian services
- Social work services
- Transportation assistance

approved cancer programs: one located at St. Tammany Parish Hospital in Covington and one located in Baton Rouge at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center.

In 2007 the Cancer Program of Our Lady of the Lake and Mary Bird Perkins was selected as one of only 14 programs in the country to participate in the National Cancer Institute's Community Cancer Centers Program (NCCCP) pilot. Most recently, this comprehensive cancer program launched a multidisciplinary colorectal cancer initiative with a full-time RN patient navigator.

In 2008 MBP partnered with Terrebonne General Medical Center and Cancer Care Specialists in Houma to provide access to comprehensive cancer care at Mary Bird Perkins at Terrebonne General Medical Center. The program offers patients care from diagnosis through treatment, and also provides community-based cancer screenings and educational outreach services to the area.

Also in 2008 Woman's Hospital and MBP partnered to form Woman's *Comprehensive Breast Care* program, which offers patients breast care from diagnosis through treatment and survivorship.

MBP operates a radiation treatment facility on the campus of North Oaks Hospital in Hammond. And, in January 2009, MBP opened its fifth location, a new outpatient cancer treatment facility in Gonzales in partnership with St. Elizabeth Hospital.

State-of-the-Art Radiation Therapy

Mary Bird Perkins offers leading-edge radiation therapy treatment modalities including intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT); advanced image-guided radiation therapy (IGRT) through BrainLAB Novalis, TomoTherapy®, and Elekta Synergy®; stereotactic radiosurgery; adaptive radiotherapy; and 4-D CT tumor localization. Since 1999, MBP has invested nearly \$31 million in patient care equipment, technology, and facilities.

Currently MBP radiation therapy staff includes 9 radiation oncologists, 12 FTE medical physicists, 9 medical dosimetrists, 23 radiation therapists, 10 radiation oncology nurses, 4 CT technologists, and 2 nuclear medicine/PET technicians.

Partnering for Progress

In 2004 Mary Bird Perkins partnered with Louisiana State University (LSU) to create the MBP-LSU Medical Physics and Health Physics Program. The program is fully accredited by the Commission on Medical Physics Educational Programs, Inc., (CAMPEP), one of only 15 such accredited programs nationwide. "We have a very strong academic component and we are working hard to grow that component," said Kenneth Hogstrom, PhD, chief of physics at MBP and the Dr. Charles M. Smith Chair of Medical Physics at LSU. The medical physics graduate program, conducted in conjunction with LSU, prepares both master's-level and doctoral-level medical physicists. "Because of the affiliation with MBP, our main focus is on radiation oncology, although we do some training in imaging," said Dr. Hogstrom. "We also conduct research. Currently, we have research grants primarily with industry although we do some basic research with LSU in the field of radiation oncology." During 2007 alone, MBP invested \$800,000 in expanding and supporting both the LSU-MBP academic and research medical physics partnership, as well as its clinical research program.

It is estimated that there is a need for 300 medical physicists annually, approximately double the amount produced by current CAMPEP programs. In an effort to address the need for well-trained medical physicists, in 2014, the American Board of Radiology will require that medical physicists have graduated from or be enrolled in a CAMPEP-accredited residency training program prior to sitting for certification exams from the American Board of Radiology, said Dr. Hogstrom. "This requirement is going to stimulate a faster growth of medical physicist residency training programs, and it will also require graduate programs to align themselves with medical physics residency training programs," he

said. Plans are currently underway for Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center to start a medical physics residency program later this year.

Partnering with the Community

In 2002 MBP established its CARE Network outreach and support program. Funded largely through the generosity of the community, its mission is "to reduce the incidence and mortality of cancer in Southeast Louisiana and to improve the quality of life for those impacted by cancer," said Renea A. Duffin, CARE Network executive director. Since the program's inception, MBP and its community partners have provided more than 27,000 screenings to the uninsured and underinsured free of charge. In 2006, the CARE Network added the MBP *Early Bird* mobile medical clinic to its early detection arsenal. Since hitting the road, the *Early Bird* has helped provide 8,127 free screenings, serving an 18-parish region. During last year's national Minority Cancer Awareness Week, the Cancer Program of Our Lady of the Lake and Mary Bird Perkins sponsored a family health fair in Baton Rouge to promote increased awareness of the importance of early detection and to improve access to care for the underserved population. The program provided 474 cancer screenings in one day—for breast, prostate, skin, and colorectal cancers. For National Prostate Cancer Awareness Month in September, MBP partnered with other organizations to provide 711 free prostate cancer screenings in convenient community locations.

MBP's CARE Network also provides a range of support services including patient transportation assistance (both van services and gas cards), social work services, breast cancer patient navigation services, dietitian, and oncologic dentist services. All services are provided to patients without charge.

"Partnerships are very critical to the success of our programs," said Duffin. "In order to reach people, we partner with others that are providing services that complement the services that we bring to the community. The entire CARE Network program has been built around [these strong partnerships]." ❏