

## The FitzPatrick Cancer Center at CVPH Medical Center, Plattsburgh, New York

The Champlain Valley Physician's Hospital (CVPH) is a 395-bed regional medical center located on the shores of Lake Champlain in the North Country area of northeastern New York. The FitzPatrick Cancer Center at CVPH provides cancer services to the tri-county area of 160,000, and beyond.

Accredited by the American College of Surgeons (ACoS) as a community comprehensive cancer center since its inception in 1990, the FitzPatrick Cancer Center is also accredited by the American College of Radiation Oncologists (ACRO). At the cancer center, outpatient medical and radiation oncology services are provided in one convenient location, on one floor within the hospital. Visitors access the cancer center through a dedicated entrance, which opens into a waiting area that serves both radiation oncology (on the right) and medical oncology (on the left).

### The Program At-a-Glance

In 2009 the cancer center opened its newly designed infusion center. "We value the voice of the patient here, and we built the new infusion area with input from our Patient Advisory Council," said Director of Oncology Services Shawn L. Rogers, MS. Based on the Patient Advisory Council's suggestions, the infusion center offers patients a choice of treatment environments. Four treatment recliners are grouped in an open setting so that patients can visit during chemotherapy. (Curtains can be pulled to provide privacy if desired.) Nine semi-private treatment bays are separated by half walls featuring etched glass partitions. Five private rooms are available for patients who are not feeling well or prefer privacy. These treatment areas are arranged around a centrally located nurse's station. Also new in 2009 is the cancer center's USP 797-compliant, dedicated pharmacy, which is adjacent to the



On display throughout the cancer center are beautiful, inspiring hand-painted tiles created by patients and family members through the Serendipity Project.

infusion area. Two dedicated full-time oncology pharmacists staff the oncology pharmacy.

The cancer center has one linear accelerator and provides leading radiation oncology treatment modalities including 3D conformal radiation therapy, intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT), stereotactic radiosurgery, and prostate seed implants. The radiation oncology department is staffed by one radiation oncologist; one full-time dedicated RN, with three other nurses cross-trained for radiation oncology; four radiation therapists, a dosimetrist; and a medical physicist.

Medical oncology and hematology services are provided by three medical oncologists who work with 13 nurses (9 of whom are oncology certified)

### Vital Statistics

- Total licensed hospital beds: 395
- Number of dedicated inpatient cancer unit beds: 40
- Number of new analytic cases seen in 2009: 562

### Selected Support Services

- Bereavement support group
- Brain tumor support group
- Breast cancer support group
- Leukemia and Lymphoma support group
- *I Can Cope; Look Good, Feel Better; Man to Man* prostate support group
- Dietitian services
- Lymphedema Program
- Healthy Steps Program
- Doorways to Healing Weekend Retreats for Women

and a clinical nurse specialist. The cancer center also has a hematology lab staffed by a dedicated phlebotomist and a lab technician.

Supportive care services are provided by the cancer center's dedicated full-time social worker, and patients also have access to an oncology-certified psychiatrist.

The cancer center holds general

tumor conferences every Tuesday at 4 pm. These multidisciplinary conferences are prospective and cover a range of disease sites. Twice a month the cancer center participates in an interdisciplinary lung cancer conference. Once a month, the program utilizes a telemedicine program for the lung cancer conference with Dana-Farber Cancer Institute or Massachusetts General Hospital on a rotating basis. This disease-site-specific conference brings together specialists in thoracic surgery, pulmonary medicine, medical and radiation oncology, radiology, and pathology.

The FitzPatrick Cancer Center works closely with the Women's Imaging Center, which is located off campus at the CVPH Health Plaza. The cancer center's oncology clinical nurse specialist is available to coordinate patient care between the two settings and also facilitates a monthly breast cancer support group, as well as an annual breast cancer survivorship celebration.

The cancer center reaches out to community partners and collaborates closely with the local chapter of the American Cancer Society (ACS). The local ACS representative sits on the cancer center's service line, as well as on the cancer committee. In 2010 the cancer center initiated patient navigation services using ACS patient navigators. At present, five ACS volunteer navigators have been trained. During business hours, these volunteers are available in the cancer center's waiting area to assist patients with directions or to help them access other community resources.

### Giving Patients a Place at the Table

"The Patient Advisory Council was born out of the oncology service line being developed at CVPH," said Mr. Rogers. "We thought it was important that the patients actually have a voice at the table, so the Patient Advisory Council elects one of its members to sit on the cancer service line. The PAC representative hears everything we're working on from the operations perspective, from the patient satisfaction and employee satisfaction perspective,



Tiles created through the Serendipity Project

and from the strategic planning perspective. We make sure we get their advice and input as we make decisions. As caregivers we will sit around the table and say we ought to do this or that, and what we've learned is that [what we think is important] might not be important to the patient. We make sure that the activities we're trying to do add value to our patients through this mechanism."

This two-way communication brings value to the cancer service line as well. No sooner had the Patient Advisory Council been established than the cancer center received some surprising feedback. Although the cancer center prided itself on providing an excellent patient education program, the Patient Advisory Council's perception was the opposite, and, in particular, they singled out the patient education materials.

Staff followed up with the Patient Advisory Council to learn what wasn't working. Through the Council, the staff heard ways in which the materials could be revised, but the primary suggestion was to improve the way in which materials were presented to patients by creating a binder that would contain all the materials. "We call it a guidebook. It has tabs that include not only educational materials, but a place to keep bills, a place for inpatient materials, a place for hospice and home health information," said Mr. Rogers. "We're working across the continuum as a service line should be, and there's a place for patients to collate all their materials as they go through treatment. If they have a question about a bill, they can bring it and see the social worker and go through the bill. This [binder] was 100 percent from our patients and their idea."

### The Community Gives Back

Another patient-driven program is the Serendipity Project. When a new linear accelerator was commissioned in 2005, the cancer center staff wanted to have artwork on the ceiling for patients to look at while they received treatment. A local artist was asked to create a mural. She suggested that the creative process be opened up to patients and their families through the opportunity to paint decorative tiles, and she offered to coordinate the effort. When the Serendipity Project was launched in 2005, the cancer center anticipated a few dozen participants, but had 100 tiles prepped just in case. To everyone's surprise 93 people showed up to paint tiles. Each year the project draws between 100 to 130 participants, and the tiles are now on display throughout the cancer center and in the hallways adjacent to the center.

The FitzPatrick Cancer Center and CVPH have received national recognition from ACS and ACoS for the local community's participation in the ACS's Cancer Prevention Study (CPS)-3. To date, 494 volunteers from the community have been recruited to CPS-3, which is open to men and women between the ages of 30 and 65 who have no personal history of cancer. The goal of the study is to help understand how to prevent cancer. The study population provides information (e.g., lifestyle, medical, or behavioral), and then participants are followed over time to assess their health outcomes.

Through the Serendipity Project, participation in CPS-3, outreach activities, and its Patient Advisory Council, the FitzPatrick Cancer Center invites community involvement and participation. ☐