

Providence Cancer Center, Providence Alaska Medical Center, Anchorage, Alaska

Anchorage, located in Alaska's Southcentral region, is home to almost two-fifths of the state's population. Since 1990 cancer has been the leading cause of death in Alaska, and for over 40 years, Providence Alaska Medical Center has been providing cancer care to patients throughout the state. Alaska poses unique geographic challenges for healthcare delivery, including the fact that many parts of the state lack a road system. Some communities are so isolated that patients travel by plane or boat to receive cancer treatment. In winter when rivers are frozen over, snowmobiles and dog teams may be used. Providence Cancer Center's Oncology Service Line Director, Wanda Katinszky, RN, BSN, MSW, OCN, has seen patients travel up to 1,200 miles to reach Anchorage for care.

At Providence Alaska Medical Center—as in many community hospitals—cancer services were provided in multiple locations. A multidisciplinary team effort brought the vision for a new outpatient cancer center to reality. “Staff had a real vested interest not just in the building, but in building the program,” said Sandra Kerns, MEd, MSW, LSCW, program manager of Oncology Support Services and the Susan Butcher Family Center at Providence Cancer Center. Part of the development process included community focus groups to ensure that patients and the community had a voice in the new facility's design. In 2008 the new 45,000-square-foot Providence Cancer Center opened, centralizing all outpatient cancer services with space to expand and enhance the cancer service line.

Today Providence Cancer Center is Alaska's only comprehensive cancer center accredited by both the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer (COC) and the American College of Radiology



A 10-week exercise rehabilitation program combines aerobic exercise, muscle strengthening, range of motion exercises, and relaxation techniques.

(ACR), as well as Alaska's only network member of the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance.

The New Facility At-a-Glance

Providence Cancer Center is housed within a five-story wing of Providence Alaska Medical Center. Radiation oncology services, located on the lower level, marry leading-edge technology with clinical expertise to offer patients state-of-the-art treatment options.

On the cancer center's first floor are patient registration, the infusion center, the infusion pharmacy, oncology research and clinical trials, laboratory and pathology services, the BP Cancer Resource Center, patient navigation services, the Healing Arts Center, and the Rabbitt Den, a quiet respite area where patients can rest in private when in between appointments over a long day.

One floor up is the Susan Butcher Family Center, oncology rehabilitation, a retail pharmacy, the tumor

Vital Statistics

- Total licensed hospital beds: 335
- Number of dedicated inpatient cancer unit beds: 12
- Number of new analytic cases seen in 2010: 1,125

Selected Support Services

Support Groups including:

- Cancer's Intimate Partners
- Breast Cancer Support Group
- “The Well” Caregiver Support Group
- Us TOO

Animal-assisted therapies: equines and canines

Healing Arts Programs, including yoga and music

Nutrition services

Appearance Boutique

Pastoral counseling

Palliative care and hospice

registry, the state American Cancer Society chapter, an integrative therapy suite, cancer program administrative offices, and three media center rooms for videoconferencing, lectures, and educational programs.

Cutting-Edge Technology

The radiation oncology program is staffed by two radiation oncologists, one PhD physicist, one master's-prepared physicist, three

dosimetrists, six radiation therapists, two nurses, three administration staff, and one manager. The ACR and ASTRO accredited facility offers the only TomoTherapy and HDR brachytherapy in Alaska. State-of-the-art radiation oncology services include:

- External beam radiation therapy
- IMRT linear accelerated based
- IMRT TomoTherapy based
- Respiratory gating
- Stereotactic radiation therapy (SRT) and stereotactic radiosurgery (SRS)
- Thyroid ablation (Iodine-131)
- Sealed source calibrations
- MammoSite HDR brachytherapy
- GYN HDR and LDR brachytherapy
- Prostate HDR brachytherapy
- Prostate LDR implant brachytherapy.

Previously, the infusion area held six chairs with limited options for privacy during treatment. The new cancer center infusion area, open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Saturday, has five private rooms, five semi-private rooms, and a five-chair group setting with views of the Chugach mountains and Chester Creek greenbelt and wetlands. Patients can watch a DVD, listen to music, or visit with a companion while receiving treatment. The infusion center provides both oncology and non-oncology treatments, as well as blood product transfusions and lab draws in addition to placing PICC lines. The center is staffed according to acuity, typically with three nurses, one charge nurse, and a clinical support technician. The oncology pharmacy, located in the infusion center, is staffed with two pharmacists and a pharmacy technician.

Access to Clinical Trials

The Providence Cancer Research Department provides access to prevention and treatment trials. The cancer center participates in a variety of NCI-sponsored trials, as well as research through its partnership with the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, which makes available trials otherwise not accessible in Alaska. Currently, 25 studies are open for enrollment.

Caring for the Whole Family

A cancer diagnosis affects patients and their loved ones. The Providence Cancer Center emphasizes care, healing, and wellness for the entire family, providing exceptional support services for patients, their families, and the community, including the Susan Butcher Family Center, the Oncology Rehabilitation Program, and multidisciplinary patient navigation services.

The Susan Butcher Family Center is a unique support resource for families of patients with cancer. Services are provided at no cost regardless of where the patient is receiving treatment. Staffed by one FTE LCSW and one part-time LCSW, the center offers support, mentoring, and education to family members from infancy to age 23. Services span the cancer continuum from diagnosis through treatment, remission, survivorship, recurrence, end of life, and bereavement. Licensed clinical and educational staff assist on an individual, family, and group basis with developmentally appropriate materials in a multi-age classroom environment. Programs are offered for families to learn about cancer, express feelings, discover ways to cope, and experience healing in a compassionate environment. The program works through 12 learning centers, including multimedia, horticulture, animal-assisted interactions and therapies, music, movement, puppetry, and science, among others. The staff also works with college interns who choose the Susan Butcher Family Center for their field practicum. The center is open year around and routinely sees 12-16 families each week for direct comprehensive services. The Susan Butcher Family Center also participates in community outreach activities, providing special programs, events, and speaker engagements for children and adults.

An Innovative Oncology Rehabilitation Program

“Professionals at the cancer center are passionate about their work. When needs are identified, someone steps up,” said Kerns. The Oncology Rehabilitation Program is one example of this commitment. Conceived to help patients improve and enhance their quality of life during cancer treatment and recovery, the program is held onsite in dedicated

gym space equipped with the latest fitness equipment. Two staff members helped design the comprehensive 10-week program, which combines aerobic exercise, muscle strengthening, relaxation techniques, and range of motion exercise, and incorporates mind-body healing through guided imagery, meditation, and affirmations. Classes are supervised by a licensed physical therapist and registered nurse, both with extensive experience and training in oncology rehabilitation. With physician referral and/or approval, patients can participate in the program. Once the session is completed, participants can continue to use the gym during open hours for a small fee. Also available are lymphedema services using complete decongestive therapy techniques and garment fitting by a certified lymphedema therapist.

Multidisciplinary Patient Navigation Team

The BP Cancer Resource Center offers the community free access to information on cancer and includes multimedia cancer resources. Providence Cancer Center’s navigation team provides support for newly diagnosed patients, those facing recurrences, and their families. The team includes: a financial counselor, a drug cost recovery specialist, oncology nurse navigators, oncology social workers, an adult psychiatric nurse practitioner, a genetic counselor, a chaplain, a dietitian, and an American Cancer Society patient navigator. This team assists with referrals to cancer providers; access to information on treatment options; coordination of care; overcoming barriers to care; and assistance with travel, lodging, and community resources for patients with cancer and their families.

Extensive Support Services

Providence Cancer Center offers a wide range of support groups and services for patients and their families, including nutrition counseling, pastoral counseling, palliative care, and ongoing caregiver support groups.

The ArtVenture program is open to patients and family members of those impacted by cancer. An Artist in Residence and guest community artists conduct art classes and open studio time is available at no charge. 🎨