

spotlight

Memorial Hermann Cancer Center— Texas Medical Center, Houston, Texas

Committed to patient-centered, personalized care

March 2012 marked the opening of a new, state-of-the-art cancer center at Memorial Hermann—Texas Medical Center, a teaching hospital for The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) Medical School. The new cancer center, located within the 30-story Memorial Hermann Medical Plaza in the Texas Medical Center, is part of Memorial Hermann Healthcare System, the largest not-for-profit healthcare system in Texas. The healthcare system includes seven comprehensive cancer centers, each with “a distinct footprint in its community,” said Jeannie Keith, RN, MSN, AOCN, NEA-BC, administrative director, outpatient cancer services. The health system’s cancer programs are now under one ACoS accreditation as an Integrated Network Cancer Program. What distinguishes the Texas Medical Center’s cancer center is its academic affiliation with UTHealth and its resources to treat all types of cancer.

The Memorial Hermann Cancer Center—TMC not only encompasses beautiful, state-of-the-art facilities, but it reflects the ongoing commitment to and growth of an academic oncology program within the health system. The collaboration between UTHealth and Memorial Hermann is helping to realize the vision of growing an academic oncology program to allow patients from Houston and beyond an opportunity at another opinion.

“We recognize that people have a choice for cancer treatment, and we are proud to be leaders in providing superior, comprehensive and accessible patient-

centered care to the Houston community,” said oncologist Robert J. Amato, DO, medical director of the Memorial Hermann Cancer Center—TMC and the director of the Division of Oncology at UTHealth.

Nearly all of the cancer center’s physicians—surgeons, radiation oncologists, medical oncologists, diagnostic and interventional radiologists—are UTHealth oncology physicians. The new cancer center will enhance collaborative efforts in developing research tracks. The cancer center’s physicians comprise a tumor-specific faculty, which also sets the program apart from the other cancer centers within the healthcare system. The cancer center has been actively recruiting faculty—nearly doubling in size over the past year—to continue efforts in tumor-specific programs, as well as the implementation of a developmental therapeutics program that will include a Phase I clinic, which is slated to open this summer.

The leading cancer sites treated are prostate, kidney, lung, brain, breast, and liver. The cancer program sees about 1,300 new analytic cases each year.

New Cancer Center Streamlines Services

Prior to the opening of the new cancer center, oncology services were spread out in multiple locations. “We had a clinic that was separate from infusion,” said Dr. Amato, “research was in another location, as was academic medicine.” Today, the entire clinical operation is located within the new cancer center, which

occupies three floors. This consolidation of services helps to streamline the care process for patients and providers.

“Everything the patient needs during their visit can be done right on site, so it’s more expeditious and efficient,” said Dr. Amato. “Patients can come in, get their blood drawn, see the physician, and the pharmacist is [located] right across from the clinical setting. It’s much more user friendly.”

While the planning process for the new cancer center design took several years, construction was completed in approximately 12 months. Now the entire 29th floor is dedicated to the beautiful 21,000-square-foot cancer center suite. An additional 6,500 feet of shell space will allow for future expansion.

As patients exit the elevator and enter the cancer center suite, they are welcomed by a greeter who logs them in. Design elements and artwork throughout the new space incorporate natural materials and calming colors. Among the unique features integrated into the design are divider panels with encased bamboo that provide privacy between infusion bays while creating a sense of openness, nature, and warmth. Similar materials are incorporated within the gentle curve of the front reception desk.

One side of the suite overlooks downtown Houston and Rice University offering stunning views of the Houston skyline. Patients can receive chemotherapy treatment in one of the 16 open infusion pods or in a private infusion room. On the other side of the clinic are



▲ The reception area features aesthetic elements that integrate nature into the cancer center's design.

16 exam rooms. Three nursing pods are included in the suite. Offices, the nurse navigator's area, the resource library, and a conference room are housed along the central corridor. Six oncology nurses staff the infusion center, and each physician works with a clinic nurse and a medical assistant. The cancer center staff includes an FTE oncology dietitian and an FTE social worker.

An exceptional feature of the new cancer center is its state-of-the-art, dedicated oncology pharmacy. The new pharmacy area, which has three hoods for mixing, "surpasses many hospital-sized pharmacies," said Keith. The pharmacy is staffed by a clinical PharmD, supporting the clinic and physician office visits, and a staff pharmacist who oversees mixing and performs double checks. Two pharmacy technicians also mix in conjunction with the pharmacist.

Multidisciplinary Disease-site Specific Clinics

The cancer center currently offers disease-site-specific multidisciplinary clinics for lung cancer, breast cancer, and gynecologic cancer, with the addition of a lung nodule clinic being planned. A full-time dedicated master's-prepared nurse navigator helps coordinate the multidisciplinary clinics.

In developing the new cancer center, consideration was given to streamlining the care process from the patient's perspective with a goal of making the patient's visit as efficient as possible. Patient care rounds—conducted before the patient visit—help center staff plan



◀ The new infusion area offers patients a beautiful view of the Houston skyline.

▼ The cancer center's new Trilogy linear accelerator.




the patient's visit to ideally minimize the need for multiple trips into the cancer center—which can be taxing for patients who are not feeling well. In attendance for the patient care rounds are the social worker, the PharmD, research coordinators, nurses, the nurse navigator, the infusion charge nurse, radiation therapy (if the patient will be receiving treatment), and physicians.

Cutting-Edge Radiation Therapy Services

The new cancer center also improves patient access to care with the addition of radiation oncology services on site. Previously, radiation therapy was not available in this location. The new two-story radiation therapy service area is the result of some "pretty phenomenal architecture," Keith said. The entrance to radiation services is located on the second floor of the Medical Plaza, adjacent to retail space. The program's new Varian Trilogy linear accelerator and treatment rooms are located on the first floor. Treatment modalities offered include high dose rate brachytherapy and stereotactic radiosurgery. Radiation oncology services are staffed by

one radiation oncologist and three RTs. Physics services are provided under a contract that covers all seven of Memorial Hermann's cancer centers. Future goals include applying for NCI-funded Radiation Therapy Oncology Group status to offer clinical trials to patients.

"We want to establish ourselves not as competitors in the oncology market here, but as offering patients the opportunity of getting another opinion, more academic focused and personalized therapy," said Dr. Amato. 

Additional Resources

- Hospital bed size: **466**
- Dedicated inpatient oncology beds: **17**
- Number of new analytic cases seen in 2010: **1,300**

Select Support Services

- Social work services
- Nutritional counseling
- Support Groups
- Cancer Resource Library
- Genetic Counseling
- Pastoral Care