

spotlight

Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center

Consolidating care & expanding access



Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare is located in the Big Bend region of the Florida Panhandle, serving Leon County and beyond. In 2012 the cancer program celebrated 62 years of accreditation from the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer (CoC), making it the longest continually CoC-accredited Comprehensive Community Cancer Program in the state. Two years ago, Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare made a significant investment in the future of its cancer program by opening Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center (TMCC). The new 52,800-square-foot cancer center fulfills two goals—consolidated cancer services and expanded access of care for the region.

Consolidated Care

TMCC brings radiation oncology and medical oncology services together in one convenient location with dedicated parking for patients and visitors. In January 2011 the new facility opened bringing state-of-the-art radiation oncology services to the community.

The first floor houses the radiation oncology department, research offices, tumor registry, patient navigation services, social work, and administrative and support offices. In July 2012 TMH Physician Partners Cancer & Hematology Specialists clinic and the outpatient infusion center opened on the second floor of the new cancer center. Located adjacent to the 30-chair infusion suite is a dedicated lab and pharmacy. This floor has space for 6 FTE physicians and 16 exam rooms.

Realizing the goal of consolidating oncology services has, in turn, helped achieve the goal of expanding access to care. TMCC's catchment area encompasses 10 Florida counties. Previously, this region was underserved in terms of the number of practicing medical oncologists located within the area. For some patients, this shortage meant traveling outside the region for care. With the opening of the new cancer center, additional physicians were recruited to the community, expanding patient access to care close to home.

TMCC's radiation oncology services have also expanded to meet the needs of its patient population. The new cancer center now features three linear accelerators, including a Novalis TX radiosurgery system, and offers the option of SRS and SBRT treatment. With the new technology in place, the program has seen a significant increase in the volume of SRS cases over the past year. "Having that treatment option available to patients is important to us," said Oncology Service Line Administrator, Matt Sherer, MBA, MHA, noting that previously patients were traveling outside the region for treatment. "We wanted patients to have a choice and to be able to stay here and get their cancer treatment close to home."

Patient-Centered Design

The cancer program's Patient Advisory Committee played a major role in the planning and design of the new cancer center. The committee, formed about five years ago, was tasked with making the new building patient and family friendly. The new cancer

center features design elements that emphasize natural lighting and materials and warm colors, creating an inviting environment of care. Waiting areas were designed to have a cozy "living room" feel with wood-like flooring. Throughout the facility, large windows allow for plenty of sunlight. Walls adorned with artwork—from nature photographs reflecting the region's biodiversity to works by local artists—bring a soothing, peaceful ambience. Adjacent to the cancer center is a healing garden, which can be viewed by patients from the infusion suite and is tended by the Tallahassee Garden Club.

The Patient Advisory Committee continues to meet on a monthly basis, keeping patients and families updated on activities in the cancer center, advising TMCC staff on any improvements needed, and providing suggestions for additional services.

Planners also designed the building to be as easy as possible for patients to navigate, another step to reduce stress in the patient experience.

An important aspect of the new facility's design was planning for future growth. "We've done a good job of designing a building we can grow into," said Sherer. For example, the building's design and property layout will allow for the addition of two more vaults if future volumes continue to grow. Sherer said that based on patient volumes, whether an additional linear accelerator, a PET/CT, or an HDR-type treatment is needed, they can employ the additional vaults to suit their community's needs.

The infusion suite also has space to



expand to 30 chairs. “We wanted to be able to grow into this building for many years as opposed to maximizing the space immediately,” Sherer said.

Commitment to Multidisciplinary Care

Another way TMCC works to expand access to care is through their affiliation with an academic medical center, UF Health Cancer Center. This partnership, announced in October 2012, increases availability of clinical research to cancer patients in the Big Bend region—both through clinical trials conducted by UF Health Cancer Center and other cooperative groups that UF Health has access to. The affiliation provides opportunities for oncology subspecialists from the academic center to participate in TMCC tumor boards via teleconferencing, furthering TMCC’s mission to provide patients access to the best care available.

The breast tumor board and regular tumor board both meet weekly. A dedicated brain tumor conference meets every two weeks and a lung conference meets once a month.

The Sharon Ewing Walker Breast Center, part of the oncology service line, has two additional accreditations: NAPBC was achieved for the first time in November of 2011 and then in April of 2012 the breast

center received ACR breast center of excellence designation. The program had been ACR-accredited for many years, but just recently achieved the highest designation level.

Creative Support Services

TMCC offers a wide array of support services to its patients. One service that patients specifically requested in the new cancer center is pet therapy. This service is offered two to three days a week throughout the cancer center.

In partnership with Florida State University, TMCC also offers art therapy. Two days a week, an art intern comes in and works with patients doing various types of artwork.


A writing workshop for patients occurs weekly. Offered both in the lobby and infusion area, this activity gives patients the opportunity to chronicle or write about their cancer journey.

For an in-depth look at TMCC’s robust music therapy program, see its article in the November/December 2012 *Oncology Issues*.

TMCC employs three patient navigators: a dedicated breast cancer navigator, a dedicated lung cancer navigator, and a dedicated survivorship navigator. In addition to these navigators, TMCC also employs a full-time social worker and two registered dietitians.

Looking to the Future

Two areas for future cancer program growth are genetics services and palliative care. Currently TMCC has a geneticist-physician that works two days a week, with about 80 percent of her cases being cancer-related. As patient volumes and need for genetic services increase, TMCC is considering hiring a certified genetics counselor.

Currently in its third year, the inpatient palliative care program has seen phenomenal growth, which TMCC plans to accommodate by possibly adding more FTE positions and expanding the program to the outpatient setting. 

Select Support Services

- Navigation services
- Survivorship program
- Integrative therapies
- Palliative care
- Pastoral care

- Analytic cases in 2011: 1,225
- Patients accrued to clinical trials in 2012: 4%