



Get Schooled

Bridgeport Hospital's One-Day Cancer College

BY MARGARET PARNIAWSKI, RN, MSN

Our One-Day Cancer College is a free educational event for the community. During the course of a few hours in one convenient location, cancer patients, their families, and others can learn first-hand from more than a dozen physicians and other healthcare professionals about the latest information on cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. The One-Day Cancer College also showcases a sampling of the various support groups and survivorship programs offered by the hospital.

Curriculum Development

Key representatives from the cancer care team develop the course curriculum. The five Centers of Excellence at the Norma F. Pfriem Cancer Institute serve as the framework, with input from experts at each Center of Excellence informing topics, presenters, and educational materials. Feedback from patients and families, including written evaluations from past conference attendees, is also used to plan the curriculum. In the end, the One-Day Cancer College provides a balance between promoting our hospital's newest technologies, treatments, and interventions and delivering information requested directly by cancer patients, families, and caregivers.

Led by key representatives from the cancer care team, the hospital's marketing department and a volunteer staff of more than 30 hospital employees work collaboratively to ensure that conference attendees have an enjoyable, relaxed, and informative experience. In total, more than 140 hospital staff members work about 300 hours throughout the year to plan and execute our One-Day Cancer College.

Active involvement of physicians and other cancer care providers is vital to the program's success. One incentive for busy providers: the positive exposure received from marketing and media relations initiatives related to the One-Day Cancer College. For example, we run a full-page ad in our local newspaper about the event. The ad lists all of the

In 2007 philanthropist Norma F. Pfriem provided a substantial gift to Bridgeport Hospital that resulted in the renaming of the hospital's cancer services as the Norma F. Pfriem Cancer Institute. To help market this new umbrella name and the hospital's cancer specialty services, the cancer care team collaborated with the hospital marketing department to develop a One-Day Cancer College. The specific objectives of the Cancer College are to:

- Understand the community need for education regarding cancer treatment and survivorship
- Promote the services of the Norma F. Pfriem Cancer Institute by focusing on its five established Centers of Excellence (Breast Cancer, Gastrointestinal Cancer, Genitourinary Cancer, Gynecologic Cancer, and Thoracic Cancer)
- Provide culturally appropriate community health promotion programs
- Provide counseling about cancer prevention.

The target audiences for the One-Day Cancer College are:

- The Greater Bridgeport community
- Cancer survivors
- Caretakers
- Physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals.

sessions, presenters, and participating physicians. We also purchase airtime on local radio channels. After our last One-Day Cancer College, our dietitians saw 40 new patients from people who attended the conference. Between sessions, we market the cancer center's survivorship and other support programs.

The lobby area features information tables and—when possible—cancer screening exhibits. In addition to hospital representatives, such as our mammography team, our community partners also exhibit here, including the American Cancer Society and *CancerCare*.

“The face-to-face contact between physicians and the audience is a defining characteristic of the One-Day Cancer College,” said Scott Thornton, MD, Co-Medical Director of the Norma F. Pfriem Cancer Institute. “Attendees truly appreciate the opportunity to receive first-hand information from medical experts in an intimate setting, where they are also free to ask specific questions about cancer care. From the physicians’ perspective, the interaction with cancer survivors and their families affirms that what they do is meaningful on a very personal level.”

Nuts & Bolts

The annual budget for the One-Day Cancer College is \$60,000, which includes the venue, guest speaker, print and broadcast advertising, fulfillment, and printing costs. Costs are shared between Bridgeport Hospital's marketing department and the Norma F. Pfriem Cancer Institute.

The planning process begins about 10 months out from the event. The planning team is comprised of staff from the hospital's marketing department and the Norma F. Pfriem Cancer Institute; lead coordinators are the oncology patient navigator and cancer resource specialist Kim Bielecki, RN, and marketing specialist Stephanie Weirsmann. The oncology steering committee and co-medical directors of the cancer institute, Dr. Thornton and Dr. Robert Folman, also offer key recommendations and input during the planning process.

The first steps are securing a venue, date, and keynote speaker. The next step is selecting between 18 to 21 physician and allied health experts to speak at the One-Day Cancer College.

Since we launched our One-Day Cancer College in 2008 the event venue has been the Trumbull Marriott Hotel, which is easily accessible from major highway arteries. The grand ballroom at the Marriott comfortably accommodates a seating arrangement for 300 people, and the hotel has several smaller meeting rooms for break-out lectures on specific cancer topics. Additionally, for cancer programs looking to develop a similar conference, the venue should have ample space for information tables and displays, be able to supply food and beverages for the event, and offer audiovisual support

during the lectures and keynote speech.

Marketing efforts for our One-Day Cancer College include internal direct mail advertising to more than 100,000 homes in the Greater Bridgeport area, print advertising in the region's major daily newspapers and town-specific weekly papers, and broadcast ads on the area's leading AM and FM radio stations.

Our Program At-a-Glance

Our One-Day Cancer College began in 2008 with two tracks of speakers answering questions and addressing concerns voiced by the audience. Attendees could attend one track or customize their schedule to hear different cancer topics from each track.

In 2009 the Cancer College expanded to three tracks, providing a greater opportunity for community education. Specifically, we added a “Mind, Body, and Spirit” track that focused on subjects such as: Coping with Cancer, Reiki for Stress Management, and What to Eat & What to Avoid During and After Cancer Treatment. This third track allowed for a total of 18 educational opportunities throughout the day.

The following are sample topics for the other two tracks (all based around the five Centers of Excellence). For example, the breast cancer track might include topics such as:

- New Options for Breast Reconstruction
- The Gene Factor
- Recent Developments: Medical Management of Breast Cancer
- Considering Surgery for Breast Cancer
- Should I Consider Oncoplastic Breast Surgery?

The gastrointestinal cancer track might feature sessions on:

- Prevention and Detection of Gastrointestinal Cancers
- Advances in Colorectal Surgery
- Stopping Cancer in its Tracks: Barrett's Esophagus and Radiofrequency Ablation
- How to Protect Your Family from Colon Cancer: Is There a Genetic Link?
- New Surgical Options for Colon Cancer
- Is Colon Cancer Hereditary?

Sample sessions in the genitourinary cancer track might include:

- GPS for the Prostate: Advances in Radiation Therapy for Prostate Cancer
- Understanding Prostate Cancer
- Advances in Kidney Cancer Treatment
- The Facts About Kidney Cancer
- Living with Prostate Cancer
- Benefits of Robot-Assisted Minimally Invasive Surgery.

Gynecologic cancer sessions might cover:

- Robot-Assisted Minimally Invasive Surgery for Gynecologic Cancer
- Am I Ready for This? Cancer and Intimacy
- Latest Advances in Uterine Cancer Treatment
- Treatment Options for Gynecologic Cancer
- Effects of Cancer Treatment on Fertility
- Radiation Treatments for Gynecologic Cancers
- Diagnosis and Treatment for Endometrial Cancer.

The track on thoracic cancer may offer topics on:

- Surgical Advances in Lung Cancer
- Palliative Care for Cancer Patients
- Advances in Lung Cancer Treatment
- Understanding Lung Cancer Tests
- Medical Management of Lung Cancer Symptoms
- Minimally Invasive Surgery for Lung Cancer.

The Keynote Speaker

A highlight of our One-Day Cancer College is the annual keynote address. The keynote speakers are responsible for putting together their own presentations. Since 2008 our One-Day Cancer College has featured these keynote speakers:

- Holly Clegg, writer, recipe-developer, and author of *Eating Well Through Cancer*, who spoke about recipe creation for patients going through cancer treatment.
- Saranne Rothberg, founder and CEO of the ComedyCures Foundation, who shared her personal cancer journey and her simple goal of helping people with cancer use the power of comic perspective and the positive benefits of laughter for the mind, body, and spirit.
- Alan Hobson, mountain climber, best-selling author, and cancer survivor, who inspired the audience with the story of his quest to climb Mount Everest and his courage to overcome a diagnosis of acute leukemia.
- Hoda Kotb, breast cancer survivor and co-host of NBC's TODAY show, who painted a vivid picture of the day-to-day physical and emotional struggles of undergoing cancer treatment.

The Feedback

Average attendance at our One-Day Cancer College exceeds 300, with 70 percent of those attending stating in post-event surveys that either they or their loved ones were currently being treated for cancer. Attendees have been predominantly

female (83 percent); nearly all (99 percent) were over the age of 40:

- 40–49 years of age (11 percent)
- 50–59 years of age (30 percent)
- 60–69 years of age (27 percent)
- 70–79 years of age (19 percent)
- 80–89 years of age (11 percent)

On our most recent post-conference evaluation forms, 100 percent of attendees responded in the affirmative to the question: “Did you enjoy the event?” Importantly, 95 percent of those attendees said they learned more about prevention and treatment of cancer having attended the event. When asked whether they were more likely to seek services from the Norma F. Pfriem Cancer Institute after attending our One-Day Cancer College, 72 percent of respondents answered in the affirmative.

The success of our One-Day Cancer College is measured not only by the positive feedback of attendees, but also by the number of referrals to Bridgeport Hospital that the event has generated. Of the 320 people who registered by phone for the most recent Cancer College, 50 (more than 15 percent) sought referrals to hospital experts and services before the event. Asked on evaluation forms if they were more likely to seek services from the Norma F. Pfriem Cancer Institute and/or its affiliated physicians after attending our One-Day Cancer College, 72 percent of attendees responded “yes.”

Lessons Learned


When developing a One-Day Cancer College, or any type of similar conference, an organized production schedule is the key, along with a firm commitment from your team members. For community cancer centers looking to implement a similar event, our team offers the following tips.

First, collaboration and details make all the difference in planning an event. Having a designated representative from the cancer care team and marketing department is very beneficial.

Second, maintain open communication and hold frequent meetings—monthly at first and then weekly if necessary in the final weeks leading up to the event

Third, you will need an excellent marketing team to most effectively highlight the event to internal stakeholders and publicize the event to external stakeholders and the public.

Listen to your audience, and include information about topics that interest them. Learn what works and what you can improve upon from past events.

Finally, as stated previously, physicians are key to this type of event, so be very nice to your doctors, who come together on their own time to share their medical expertise. 

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