

spotlight

The Elkhart General Hospital Center for Cancer Services, Elkhart, Indiana

The Elkhart General Hospital Center for Cancer Services has been serving Elkhart County, Indiana since 1913. From 2001-2012, Elkhart General has received the Outstanding Achievement Award from the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer (CoC). It is one of only 13 programs in the nation to receive that honor for three consecutive review cycles.

"We are a community hospital, but we deliver the same level of care that a bigger referral center would," said Toni Klatt-Ellis, APRN, MN, AOCN, advanced practice nurse for Oncology Services.

Meeting Community Needs

When the recession began in 2008, Elkhart County was particularly hard hit. In 2009 Elkhart had the highest unemployment rate in the nation. For the cancer center, this economic downturn has meant treating an increasing number of uninsured and under-insured patients. "To provide people a level of comfort that they're going to get exceptional care here, and that they don't have to travel [to another cancer center] is important," said Klatt-Ellis, emphasizing that patients don't have to worry about incurring additional expenses involved in traveling for care.

Most of the oncology services offered by Elkhart General are housed on the hospital campus. The inpatient Oncology Care Unit is located on the fourth floor of Elkhart General Hospital. Two private medical oncology practices are close by, one adjacent to the hospital and the other, five minutes away. Patients may choose to

receive chemotherapy at either the medical oncology offices or in the hospital's ambulatory infusion clinic. Almost all other oncology services are located on the lower level of the hospital, including the ambulatory infusion clinic, radiation oncology, and the interdisciplinary Breast and Thoracic clinics.

The radiation oncology department is accredited by the American College of Radiation Oncology (ACRO). The department offers state-of-the-art therapies, such as Rapid Arc and Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy.

In 2006 Elkhart General expanded and updated their inpatient Oncology Care Unit. The 20-room unit contains all private rooms designed to feel like home with a living-room atmosphere. A spacious family area is equipped with a huge living room and a fireplace. Bathroom facilities were remodeled to accommodate family members who want to spend the night. The unit also has a full kitchen with a large dining room table for patients with many visiting family members to enjoy a meal together as if they were at home. According to Vicky Carter, CTR, cancer registry data quality control coordinator at Elkhart General, this unique space is popular for Thanksgiving and Christmas meals, and has also been used for birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, and even weddings.

The Breast Care Center, situated in the West Wing of the hospital, is recognized as a Certified Quality Breast Center of Excellence, Certification Level III – the highest certification level awarded by the

National Consortium of Breast Centers National Quality Measures for Breast Centers™ Program. The Breast Care Center was also awarded the Breast Imaging Center of Excellence designation by the American College of Radiology (ACR).

Patient navigation services are offered at Elkhart General to help coordinate care. A general navigator is available to patients treated on the inpatient unit. Nurse navigators also guide patients through the Breast and Thoracic Clinics. Navigators are also available to accompany patients to appointments and help resolve insurance issues.

To comply with the federal requirement mandating all 501(c)(3) hospitals to complete a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), Elkhart General performed their CHNA in 2012. After surveying Elkhart County, the hospital identified a significant lung cancer population, obesity, and a high smoking rate as the top health issues affecting its community.

Smoking rates in Elkhart County are higher than the national rate and the percentage of patients who are diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer is greater than 50 percent; also above the national average. With these needs identified, Elkhart General's next step was to implement programs addressing these areas.

Lung Cancer Screening Program

Based on CHNA data, as well as the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) 2012 Guidelines and data from the



Select Support Services

- Patient navigation
- Social work services
- Survivorship program
- Patient support groups
- Nutrition services
- Number of new analytic cases seen in 2011: 711

National Lung Screening trial, Elkhart General developed a lung cancer screening program in June 2012. In addition to a need identified by the community assessment, physician champions at the hospital were also vital to the initiation of the screening program in June 2012.

First Elkhart General established a multidisciplinary thoracic oncology clinic to be able to have a disease-specific clinic for patients diagnosed with lung cancer. Staff then worked with Central Scheduling to develop a database for these patients that would facilitate scheduling and tracking of follow-up scans.

A copy of the patient's initial scan is stored in Elkhart General's database, and a copy is also sent to the patient's primary care provider. At the follow-up appointment, patients are briefed on the implications from their scan, and staff collects their smoking history, if applicable. Patients that are currently smoking are offered smoking cessation options, including classes or one-on-one clinic visits with nurse practitioners. After that,

the patient receives a copy of the letter confirming that the follow-up conversation took place with hospital staff. Information on their next appointment is mailed to them by the scheduling department. The patient's primary care provider receives a copy of this letter, a copy of the NCCN guidelines, and a copy of the scan.

Since the program began, about 180 patients have been seen. According to Klatt-Ellis, the greatest number of referrals has come from cardiologists.

Engaged Patients

Elkhart General Hospital holds Breast, Thoracic, and General Cancer Conferences. Breast conferences are held weekly, and Thoracic and General take place twice a month. As with most cancer conferences, attendees include medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, surgeons, pathologists, radiologists, and other specialists. In an effort to promote patient-centered care, Elkhart General also invites patients and their families to attend the conferences. Patients are contacted by the

nurse navigator prior to the conference to coordinate conference details.

Attendance at the conference allows patients to view radiology films and pathology slides. Patients also have the opportunity to meet with clinicians, a social worker, and dietitian following their presentation to further clarify any remaining questions.

According to Klatt-Ellis, most patients take advantage of this open forum where they can ask questions and gain full knowledge of disease, staging, treatment, and prognosis along with clinical trial opportunities. Patients can even record the discussion. "The patients and families have loved this open forum. They feel like they're getting the opinion of 10 physicians in one room to work together on their plan of care," she said.

As a part of the program's theme of "Guide, Nurture, Transform," Elkhart General is committed to ensuring that every oncology patient is satisfied with their care experience every time they are seen during their cancer journey. 