

# spotlight

## Southcoast Centers for Cancer Care Fairhaven and Fall River, Massachusetts



**S**outhcoast Centers for Cancer Care is part of a comprehensive health system comprised of three hospitals and a variety of ambulatory centers known as Southcoast Health. Southcoast Centers for Cancer Care, a certified member of the MD Anderson Cancer Network™, serves the southeastern coastal communities of Massachusetts.

Oncology services are provided at two sites: a free-standing facility in Fairhaven, and on the Charlton Memorial Hospital campus in Fall River. The two locations are 22 miles apart. Both sites provide radiation and medical oncology services. Between both locations, Southcoast is staffed by three radiation oncologists, seven medical oncologists, and provides genetic counseling. Each center has one linear accelerator on site. Outpatient medical oncology services are delivered at both locations.

Inpatient oncology care is provided in designated inpatient oncology units staffed with a core group of chemotherapy certified nurses. Southcoast strives to provide the same standard of care across all their

settings. “Our policies for oncology cross over both outpatient and inpatient. For example, patients are receiving chemotherapy in-house under the exact same policies and standards as the outpatient setting,” said Carme Tripp, RN, MHA, OCN, director of Oncology Patient Care Services.

In the infusion centers at both locations, all treatment bays are private or semi-private with flat screen TVs, recliners, and gliders. Patients are provided snacks or lunch and warm blankets by volunteer staff. Fairhaven has 16 treatment bays with infusion suites and Fall River has 13. To ensure infusions are prepared and delivered in a timely fashion, an embedded oncology pharmacy is adjacent to each treatment room, staffed by dedicated oncology pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Southcoast Centers for Cancer Care in Fall River is on the Charlton Memorial Hospital campus with a dedicated entrance and parking lot for cancer patients and their families. The cancer center is linked to the main hospital building by a tunnel.

### Thoracic Multidisciplinary Clinic

Offered exclusively at this site and entering its fourth year, is Southcoast’s thoracic clinic. At the bi-weekly clinic, a multidisciplinary team of thoracic surgeons, medical and radiation oncologists, pulmonologists, oncology nurses, radiation therapists, social worker, nutritionist, and patient navigator reviews all newly diagnosed lung cancer cases. A pre-clinic conference is held where the patient’s clinical results and information are reviewed by the team and a plan of care formulated. The physicians then meet

with the patient and family. Other members of the team are introduced to the patient and family based on the patient’s specific needs. Patients leave the clinic with a treatment plan and an appointment for their next visit. Physicians are encouraged to refer patients to the clinic as soon as a lung cancer diagnosis is suspected and clinic staff coordinate all diagnostic testing.

As the process has significantly shortened time from diagnosis to treatment, Southcoast is looking to expand this clinic model to head and neck patients at the Fairhaven location. In addition to the thoracic clinic, Southcoast holds weekly breast, colorectal, and general tumor boards at both sites.

### Wraparound Care

Southcoast strives to provide “wraparound care” which, according to Tripp means engaging patients even before they arrive for their first appointment and maintaining that engagement through survivorship. A dedicated patient intake coordinator handles all new patient referrals. With a process in place to centralize referrals and collect health information before a first visit, Southcoast providers can have more meaningful initial appointments with patients.

Patient navigators are also available to patients before they begin cancer treatment. Southcoast coordinates with referring primary care physicians and specialists in the community, and if they have a patient in the office experiencing high distress, a Southcoast nurse navigator can intervene. The navigators can either meet with patients at their doctor’s office, or call the patient

### Select Support Services

- Nutritionist
- Oncology rehabilitation
- Social work
- Navigation
- Support groups
- Genetic counseling

Number of analytic cases seen in 2010: 1,190



and begin a discussion on next steps for treatment.

Southcoast's navigator policy is to provide this service to any patient identified as having a barrier to care (financial, emotional, educational, etc.). Patients receiving dual modality treatment (both chemotherapy and radiation therapy), head and neck patients, and brain tumor patients are also followed by a navigator.

In addition Southcoast employs a dedicated nutritionist two days a week at each site and two full-time social workers (one at each site).

Wraparound care also means putting measures in place to ensure that regardless of site of service, patients are, according to Tripp, "getting the right treatment in the right place at the right time."

One of these wraparound measures aims to keep patients out of the emergency department. Southcoast created a special "Fever Card" for neutropenia patients. Patients are taught that if they have a fever of 100.4 degrees or above during office hours, they are to immediately call or come in and be seen. At that point, Southcoast conducts a series of tests, including blood cultures and chest x-rays, and begins the appropriate antibiotic. The goal is to have patients receive the antibiotic within 60 minutes of presenting. If a patient has a fever after hours or on weekends, they are taught to go to their local emergency or urgent care facility and present their Fever Card to the triage nurse. Key to this Fever Card program is emphasizing to patients that they must keep the Fever Card with them at all times. Patients with a high fever

present this red, white, and black card to their local emergency department or urgent care. The card gives very specific, simplified instructions for these departments to begin the appropriate care promptly. The card includes phone numbers for both cancer centers, as well as the treating physician.

Since implementing the Fever Card program, Southcoast has decreased the amount of time from when the patient presents to when they receive antibiotics from over 4-5 hours to 90 minutes.

### Quality and Accreditation Specialist

As mentioned previously, Southcoast Centers for Cancer Care is a certified member of the MD Anderson Cancer Network™. Southcoast is also accredited by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer, certified by QOPI, and has earned The Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval.

To maintain and sustain the standards that must be in place for these distinctions, Southcoast has a full-time Quality and Accreditation Specialist on staff. The specialist is dedicated to the oncology program and, according to Tripp, "having a full-time, in-house quality and accreditation specialist, is really key. We've had this position for four years and she is focused not only on the accreditations but also on the day to day quality with staff and the physicians."

### Community Outreach & Education

As part of its survivorship services, Southcoast partners with **LIVESTRONG** to provide a free reconditioning program.



Offered at three local YMCAs, this 12-week program is oncology-specific. Staff from Southcoast meet with YMCA staff regularly to review the effectiveness of the program and how to enhance participation.

A majority of Southcoast's patient population reside in the coastal towns that comprise the southeastern coast of Massachusetts. According to Tripp, reliable transportation is a significant barrier to care for many. To counter this, the cancer centers make use of the Southcoast Health System Mobile Van Services to bring screening events (head and neck and skin are the two most popular) to their patients in their own communities.

Southcoast vans park in local drug store lots, or sometimes right by the docks, to bring their screening and awareness services directly to the large population of commercial and transient fishermen who are often representative of an underserved population. Each van is equipped with two or three exam rooms. Every screened patient leaves with information about the cancer center and the warning signs for cancer in Portuguese, Spanish, or English. 