

spotlight

Bismarck Cancer Center Bismarck, North Dakota



Bismarck Cancer Center (BCC) is a joint venture between Bismarck's two medical centers—CHI St. Alexius Medical Center and Sanford Bismarck Medical Center. BCC is a freestanding facility providing radiation oncology services to a patient population spanning a 250-mile radius that includes most of North Dakota, and parts of South Dakota and Montana. While the facility is situated in the city of Bismarck, this wide catchment area requires BCC to perform “both a rural approach, as well as a more urban approach” to cancer care, according to Ken Dykes, BCC's executive director.

Outreach and Education

BCC is proactive in its approach to mitigating barriers to care for patients living in more rural areas. “We already have people who

drive a considerable distance to receive treatment here, so we try to reach out to them. We provide housing and transportation assistance, and a host of other wrap-around services to try and make access to care as easy and painless as it can possibly be,” said Dykes. BCC conducts two outreach clinics each month. Two BCC radiation oncologists, along with nursing staff, travel to these clinics located 100 miles from Bismarck.

The cancer center also employs an outreach coordinator who is responsible for community relations and development. “The idea is that cancer affects everybody, so the better job we do letting people know what's available and where it's available, the better off everyone will be,” said Dykes. BCC's outreach efforts focus mainly on education and screening in local communities, as well as making people aware of resources that are available within driving distance of where they live. “Our belief is that if we actually meet, talk to, and establish a relationship with people throughout our service area, then they'll be more likely to pick up the phone and call us if they have specific needs or questions. Or they can call the [outreach] coordinator to ask her to facilitate resources they might like to have brought into the community,” said Dykes.

Bismarck Cancer Center Foundation

Since 2007 the Bismarck Cancer Center Foundation has helped to ease some of the additional burdens that accompany a cancer diagnosis. For patients traveling to the Bismarck location to receive treatment, BCC offers both travel assistance and lodging

assistance. Through the Bismarck Cancer Center Foundation, patients can receive gas cards and have access to discounted furnished apartments within walking distance of the cancer center and discounted rooms at nearby hotels. In addition to transportation and lodging assistance, foundation funds support a survivorship program, a massage therapist, dietitian/nutrition counseling, physical therapy, occupational therapy with lymphedema, support groups, and survivorship classes.

“Making sure that we provide not only the best technology and treatments, but also care that meets all other patient needs is why BCC can provide wraparound care,” said Amy Gross, assistant director of operations.

All BCC staff are empowered to be alert to needs that are expressed or manifest (even if they're not expressed) by patients and families as they come through the cancer center. If staff notes an issue, they can initiate a meeting with the fiscal officer to move forward with setting a patient up with foundation assistance. The foundation raises funds through donations, community events and fundraisers, and local and national grants.

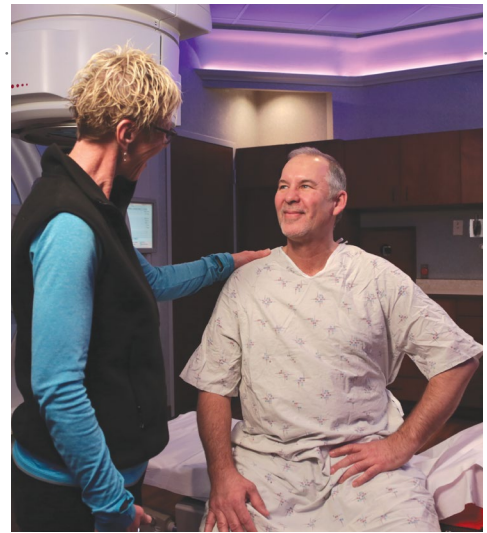
Dykes gives credit to the foundation's advisory board for the success in securing assistance for patients in need. A group of dedicated volunteers, the advisory board is comprised of “leaders in the community” who generously donate their time and energy to help reduce barriers to care for indigent patients.

Additional patient support is provided via BCC's REACH (Resources, Educate, Advocacy, Care, Hope) program. The REACH

Select Support Services

- Support group
- Financial assistance
- Transportation assistance
- Lodging assistance
- Massage therapy
- Spiritual and emotional care
- Nutrition and dietary counseling
- Physical therapy
- Survivorship Care

Number of new analytic cases seen in 2014: 440



coordinator, a licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW) meets with patients within the first week of treatment and provides the support services that a social worker would, including helping patients apply to financial assistance programs, educating patients on managing stress, and more. Patients have the option of meeting regularly with the REACH coordinator after this initial consult. The REACH program is funded through the BCC Foundation.

A Robust Service Line

BCC offers a full range of radiation oncology treatment modalities and also performs the following special procedures:

- External beam radiation therapy
 - 3D-CRT (conformal radiation therapy)
 - IMRT
 - VMAT (volumetric modulated arc therapy)
 - SRS (stereotactic radiosurgery)
 - SBRT (stereotactic body radiation therapy)
 - 4D-IGRT
- Brachytherapy
 - Low-dose rate brachytherapy (prostate seed implant)
 - High-dose rate brachytherapy (GYN and MammoSite).


BCC radiation oncologists regularly participate in multidisciplinary tumor conferences at area hospitals. In addition, they are actively involved in multidisciplinary breast cancer care conferences at both CHI St. Alexius Medical Center and Sanford Bismarck Medical Center.

Improving Care Coordination

As a cancer survivor, Dykes understands firsthand how draining the logistics of receiving cancer treatment can be. “Even under the best of circumstances, a cancer patient is often overwhelmed with the level of activity necessary to get to all of the people and places providing care. And all of this must take place at a time when the patient isn’t feeling very well.”

BCC is jointly owned by CHI St. Alexius and Sanford Health and provides radiation oncology services for both hospitals. To ensure smooth care coordination, BCC’s patient navigation program establishes the connection between medical oncology and radiation oncology. BCC nurses handle the patient navigation responsibilities, helping patients and their families to find available resources, treatment services, and support options to best fit their unique needs. The BCC navigation program also schedules treatment and follow-up appointments, including imaging and labs; helps patients and their families understand doctors’ instructions; and answers questions. In addition, the navigation program connects patients with support services for nutrition, physical therapy, massage therapy, emotional counseling, spiritual counseling, and solving practical problems related to treatment, for example, transportation, financial assistance, lodging, wigs and prosthetics, pain management, and exercise. BCC’s nurses work with the doctors and cancer team to make sure patients are aware of services that can help them and ensure no gaps exist between medical and radiation oncology care.

BCC operates a physician hotline which allows doctors to speak directly to a radiation oncologist to get information or seek advice on treatment or side effects. Patients can also easily get their questions or concerns answered; BCC nurses field patient calls that involve the reporting of new symptoms or questions.

BCC employs two nurses specializing in cancer survivorship. They prepare comprehensive survivorship care plans that are provided to patients at the end of their radiation treatment. Survivorship care plans document the treatment patients received, a recommended follow-up schedule, short- and long-term side effects of the disease and treatments, what to look for regarding reoccurrence, chronological list of events in their cancer journey, and a list of various support systems within the community. The survivorship plan helps streamline communication for patients as they transition back to their primary care provider, and provides the patient with a concise treatment summary for use by any future treating personnel. 

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