

spotlight

Johnston Hematology Oncology Smithfield, N.C.



Founded in 1996 by Johnston Memorial Hospital, Johnston Cancer Center—an outpatient hospital department—was originally located in a mobile building in Smithfield, N.C. The program came about as a collaborative effort with Duke Oncology Outreach Service, now the Duke Cancer Network, to provide much-needed oncology care to Johnston County. Duke agreed to provide the cancer center with medical providers, clinical education, nursing staff, and consultation for issues such as policy creation. When the cancer center moved locations, it was renamed Johnston Hematology Oncology.

Following the move, the newly rechristened Johnston Health asked Duke to help put together a certificate of need for radiation oncology services for Johnston Hematology Oncology. The certificate was approved, and Johnston Health announced

that it would collaborate with UNC Health Care, with this partner lending its expertise to managing shared services such as the cancer center's electronic health record, IT system, and phone infrastructure. Through unique collaborations and partnerships, a community cancer center leveraged the expertise and skills of two academic powerhouses in the state to support patient needs.

Though billing was initially split between Duke on the provider side and UNC Health Care on the management side, billing was consolidated in 2018. Bryant Washington, MBA/MHA, BSN, RN, OCN, director of oncology at Johnston Health, says that this merging has reduced patient confusion, because patients no longer receive bills from two institutions—just one comprehensive cancer center.

Comprehensive Care in the Community

Johnston Hematology Oncology now has two locations in the towns of Smithfield and Clayton, each offering the same services. The centers are each staffed with 2 Duke medical oncologists, a Duke nurse practitioner, 12 nurses, 2 pharmacists, a nurse navigator, and an oncology social worker. Both locations provide hematology and medical oncology services and chemotherapy, including blood transfusion and hydration; radiation therapy is available at both sites through the joint venture of Johnston Health and UNC REX Healthcare. Patients who require more intensive therapy, such as patients with acute leukemia, are referred to other UNC Health Care or Duke locations based on their location, insurance coverage, clinical trial candidacy, and other criteria.

Johnston Hematology Oncology offers access to Duke clinical trials on site, and referrals are made to UNC Health Care when access to its trials is required. The cancer center has a 4 percent clinical trial accrual rate for the nearly 600 new analytic cases it sees each year. Breast, lung, hematologic, and colorectal cancers are the most common cancers treated at Johnston Hematology Oncology. The cancer center has been accredited by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer since 2015 and renewed its accreditation earlier this year.

The cancer center helps its patients alleviate the financial burden of cancer care with two dedicated financial counselors. Originally, Johnston Hematology Oncology contracted with UNC Health Care's Medica-



tion Assistance Program to enroll patients in co-pay assistance and free drug programs offered by foundations and pharmaceutical companies. In 2018 the cancer center brought its financial counseling services back in-house. To better understand the fundamentals of the oncology care payment system and financial toxicity, all financial counselors at the cancer center are required to take the Association of Community Cancer Centers Financial Advocacy Boot Camp eLearning curriculum (acc-cancer.org/fanbootcamp).

Caring for a Rural Population

The rural towns of Smithfield and Clayton are surrounded by farming communities that specialize in growing tobacco and sweet potatoes. However, the conversion of farmland to housing has increased in recent years. Still, the need for quality rural cancer care is a constant. Johnston Hematology Oncology's Smithfield offices are located in a retrofitted textile mill, representative of the region's adaptability and need.

Some of the region's most pressing health needs are related to its poor dietary patterns and large population of smokers. To address these concerns, the staff social worker at Johnston Hematology Oncology assesses all incoming patients to identify potential lifestyle or cancer-related issues, amending care plans if necessary and referring patients to appropriate supportive services. Smokers are referred to smoking cessation classes at both Duke and UNC Health Care, and in-house smoking cessation classes are offered as resources allow. The Smithfield office is just across the street from the Johnston County Health Department, and Washington says that educators there are working with the cancer center to reformat its smoking cessation program.


Patients in the region travel an average of 10 to 15 miles for cancer care, and patients traveling from eastern parts of Wayne County travel up to 30 miles, placing a significant logistical burden on patients and families. "Public transportation is a big issue in our county," Washington says. "We don't have a robust bus system or light rail like you'd find in a bigger city." To better accommodate its

patients, Johnston Hematology Oncology tries to schedule patient appointments to include visits with as many providers as possible at one time. The cancer center also maintains an angel fund for patients who require travel assistance by providing gas cards or bus fare to those who need it.

Johnston Hematology Oncology hosts a monthly general support group as well as a monthly support group for new patients. The new patient support group covers a different topic each month, including:

- Getting to Know the Cancer Center & Distress
- Navigation & Treatment Decisions
- Nutritional Needs
- Next Steps & Community Resources.

With the advent of social networking, these groups have required significant overhaul, because the immediacy of available information online can sometimes diminish interest in in-person support. Says Washington, "It's a challenge as well as a blessing, trying to make sure patients get appropriate information and aren't being misinformed."

"Being able to meet the needs of the patient in a true community cancer center—it's different when you're in bigger cancer centers," Washington adds. "Being in this community is different. The patients are very grateful for the care we provide, and they appreciate the ability to seek expert care close to home. This organization strives to provide similar resources to any other cancer center in the country, whether it be a big city or small town. Johnston Health has a lot to be proud of." 



Select Supportive Services Include:

- Support groups
- Smoking cessation classes
- Nutrition services

Number of new analytic cases seen in 2018: 589