

spotlight

St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Edgewood, Kentucky



St. Elizabeth Cancer Care is an outpatient department of St. Elizabeth Healthcare, a large multi-hospital system. The cancer program treats approximately 300,000 patients annually across four hospital-based locations in rural and urban communities in northern Kentucky and southern Indiana.

St. Elizabeth Cancer Care opened the doors to St. Elizabeth Cancer Center—a new 250,000-ft² facility—in October 2020. “Patient survey after patient survey indicated that the community wanted to receive care in one building; to receive real multidisciplinary care; and to try and make sure that patients have one point of contact to help direct their care,” explains Douglas Flora, MD, LSSBB, executive medical director of oncology at St. Elizabeth Healthcare. Through the three years of planning and development it took to launch the new facility, St. Elizabeth Cancer Care leadership sought the input of frontline staff—including oncology nurses, physicians, therapists, and front desk staff—to ensure that the new facility matched staff workflows to best facilitate patient care. The new facility is designed to reduce the risk of infections, including measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (e.g., touch-free doors, impermeable terrazzo floors that are easy to keep clean, and a built-in contact tracing and tracking software system). This new cancer center offers patients quality cancer care under one roof, including medical, radiation, and surgical oncology and a full complement of supportive care services.

St. Elizabeth Cancer Center is considered the hub of St. Elizabeth Cancer Care’s four hospital-based locations: St. Elizabeth

Cancer Center (Edgewood, Ky.), St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Grant (Williamstown, Ky.), St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Ft. Thomas (Ft. Thomas, Ky.), and St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Dearborn (Dearborn, Ind.). St. Elizabeth Cancer Center received the Outstanding Achievement Award by the American College of Surgeons’ Commission on Cancer in 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019 and was named a Care Continuum Center of Excellence by the GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer in 2019.

A Staffing Model to Meet All Needs

Many of St. Elizabeth Cancer Care’s oncologists are employed by St. Elizabeth Edgewood Hospital at St. Elizabeth Cancer

Center, and they travel once or twice a week to treat patients at its remaining three locations. Oncologists who are not employed by St. Elizabeth Edgewood Hospital work for the St. Elizabeth Physician Group, and their services are leased by the cancer program through the hospital. All other staff are employed by St. Elizabeth Healthcare and are employees of the hospital-based location in which they work.

Because St. Elizabeth Cancer Care treats patients in two states, its oncologists must be licensed to practice in both Kentucky and Indiana. All other staffing is standardized across all four hospital-based locations. Each location employs hospital outpatient department clerical support and ambassa-



St. Elizabeth Cancer Center



Main lobby



Infusion pod

dors, registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses, physicians, medical assistants, nurse navigators, infusion nurses, tumor registrars, an IT specialist, a process improvement specialist, quality data abstractors, social workers, financial navigators, and precertification staff. The only exception to this standardized staffing model is that a nurse practitioner travels between St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Grant and St. Elizabeth Cancer Center. A nurse practitioner is employed at each of the remaining two cancer care locations—St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Ft. Thomas and St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Dearborn. To provide patients specialized care, St. Elizabeth Cancer Care oncologists maintain relationships with the private

practices in its community. These providers often collaborate with community physicians to offer surgery options not otherwise available. St. Elizabeth oncologists may also make referrals to community physicians and vice versa, so patients can receive the specific care and treatment they require.

A Suite of Multidisciplinary Services

St. Elizabeth Cancer Care offers medical oncology services at each of its four locations and radiation oncology services in two locations. Having multiple community locations enables St. Elizabeth Cancer Care to keep patients as close to home as possible during treatment. Medical oncology employs

12 medical oncologists, 9 advanced practice registered nurses, and clinic nursing staff. Oncology infusion services are offered at all four St. Elizabeth oncology locations. St. Elizabeth Cancer Center has a 58-chair infusion suite, and the remaining locations offer 12- to 15-chair infusion suites. St. Elizabeth Cancer Center's infusion bay is set up in pods of chairs and beds, with each section containing 12 chairs, and a dedicated infusion pharmacy is located at the center.

St. Elizabeth Cancer Center's infusion pharmacy is staffed by three clinical pharmacists, three compounding technicians, and two technicians who hand deliver infusion medications. The cancer center pharmacy functions as a touchpoint for all St. Elizabeth oncology pharmacy sites, with workspaces for infusion clinical and technician staff, an inpatient clinical pharmacist, an oncology postgraduate year two resident, and an investigational drug services pharmacist. Patients at St. Elizabeth Cancer Center also have access to a retail pharmacy where they can pick up their oncology and non-oncology prescriptions after an appointment. The remaining St. Elizabeth Cancer Care locations' infusion suites each have a dedicated oncology pharmacist staffed by a clinical infusion pharmacist and a compounding technician.

To further expand access to care, radiation oncology services are available at St. Elizabeth Cancer Center and St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Ft. Thomas. St. Elizabeth Cancer Care provides patients EBRT, SRS, SBRT, HDR brachytherapy, and Calypso radiotherapy through three state-of-the-art linear accelerators in its hub and one in its Ft. Thomas location. The radiation oncology department is staffed by four radiation oncologists, three therapists per treatment machine, a lead therapist, a computed tomography technologist, four certified medical dosimetrists, four contracted medical physicists, and reception and nursing staff, including nurse practitioners. To minimize travel burdens for patients living in more remote locations, treatment appointments are completed in the morning at St. Elizabeth Cancer Care Ft. Thomas, so consults and follow-up slots are available in the afternoon. Patients receiving radiation treatment at St. Elizabeth Cancer Center will soon have access to these services via a dedicated entrance and parking lot a short distance away once construction is completed in May.

St. Elizabeth Cancer Center also offers surgical oncology and specialty services. With 12 surgeons on staff, the cancer center provides surgical treatments for gynecologic, thoracic, and general oncology. The cancer center is currently looking to improve the available surgical oncology services by adding several dedicated surgical oncologists.

The cancer program prioritizes patients' psychosocial care through a variety of free supportive care services available to patients at St. Elizabeth Cancer Center's integrative oncology department. Located on first floor, the department offers yoga and meditation, art and music therapy, on-site counseling, social work services, financial navigation, acupuncture services, therapeutic massage, and disease-specific support groups. Patients may be referred to integrative oncology services by social workers after they complete an intake form or if a need arises during their treatment. A Panera-style cafeteria is also available to patients, which promotes healthy eating options for those in treatment.

A Determination to Reduce Barriers to Care

Each year, St. Elizabeth Cancer Care seeks out several diverse pockets of patient advocates, community representatives, civic leaders, and other local stakeholders to identify barriers to quality cancer care in its community. In 2020, health literacy and lung health were chosen as areas for improvement via a community health needs assessment and patient survey results. Because of poor health literacy in its service area, the cancer program has invested heavily in its community outreach efforts. For example, its integrative oncology team is developing a formal program to run demonstration teaching kitchens led by local chefs, oncology dietitians, and the St. Elizabeth Cancer Care integrative medical director, who is certified in lifestyle medicine to teach patients with cancer how to cook and eat safely to improve their quality of life. These classes are free to patients and are available at the St. Elizabeth Cancer Center. "We're teaching patients how to cook foods that they can still taste while on chemotherapy," explains Dr. Flora. "And teaching them diets or nutritional exercises that might help reduce their risk of breast cancer recurrence or colon cancer polyp development."



Demonstration kitchen in Integrative Oncology



Retail pharmacy

In response to a high incidence of lung cancer resulting from the region's high smoking rates, St. Elizabeth Cancer Care established a robust lung cancer screening program. The program is one of the largest lung cancer screening programs in the United States, says Dwinelva Zackery, director of integrative oncology at St. Elizabeth Healthcare. "Last year, we screened about 4,200 patients for lung cancer," she says. "We're finding lung cancer in about 1 in every 56 scans."

Two dedicated nurse navigators help patients navigate through St. Elizabeth Healthcare when they are referred to the program. A nodule review board made up of the two nurse navigators, medical oncology, radiology, pulmonology, thoracic surgery, and primary care meets weekly to review and discuss all lung screenings, including those with incidental findings or findings from

patients' other computed tomography scans. Patients can be screened at all St. Elizabeth Cancer Care locations and are then referred to the lung cancer screening program. Once referred and treatment plans are made, patients receive care in the St. Elizabeth oncology location that is closest to their home.

As the development of the new cancer center and dedication to expanding its cancer services show, St. Elizabeth Cancer Care truly puts its patients' needs first. "This organization really puts the patient at the center," says Zackery. "There's been a lot of commitment from St. Elizabeth Healthcare to build in all of those supports that are so critical to a patient as they go through such a difficult time. I'm really proud of being able to be a part of building that for our patients, our families, and our community." 