

spotlight

Roger Williams Cancer Center Providence, Rhode Island



Roger Williams Cancer Center offers a unique approach to multidisciplinary cancer care for patients in and near Providence, R.I. It is an outpatient department of Roger Williams Hospital and is located across the street from the hospital in its own building. The cancer center is part of CharterCare Health System, which is comprised of Roger Williams Hospital and Our Lady of Fatima Hospital in North Providence, R.I. CharterCare began as an initiative of the two hospitals to bring patients in the city high-quality care in multiple locations. It has since been purchased by Prospect Medical Holdings—a large, multi-state health system that operates Roger Williams Cancer Center and Hospital as a for-profit entity.

With the resources to serve many patients in their region, the staff at Roger Williams Cancer Center take pride in their ability to offer high-quality cancer services in the community setting that are tailored to meet the needs of its patients. The cancer center holds many accreditations, including those from the Foundation for Accreditation of Cellular Therapy, National Marrow Donor Program, and American Society for Transplantation and Cellular Therapy. It is also designated by the Commission on Cancer as an academic comprehensive cancer center. Through these accreditations and an affiliation with the Boston University School of Medicine, the cancer center offers comprehensive cancer care that enables patients to stay in their communities while they receive treatment.

Comprehensive Community-Based Care

A majority of the cancer center's oncologists are employed by Roger Williams Hospital, and a few are employed by Charter Care Medical Associates—a medical group practice in the community. All remaining clinical and non-clinical staff are employed by the hospital, with the exception of radiation oncology staff. The cancer center offers its radiation oncology services on its first floor in partnership with GenesisCare—the largest radiation oncology provider in the United States, which employs all of the cancer center's radiation oncology staff. Most patients with cancer who receive radiation are referred by Roger Williams' clinicians, and others are referred from other providers in the community. To further its dedication to providing patients the newest treatment technology, an Elekta Versa HD™ will soon be added to the radiation oncology department, allowing radiation oncologists to use a MRI-guided system to make real-time adjustments to individual treatment plans.

Due to the nature of many oncology treatment plans and the cancer center's radiation oncology model, care coordination is vital to ensure that patients receive the appropriate treatment in a timely fashion. Roger Williams Cancer Center and GenesisCare staff prioritize communication and collaboration to ensure that patients are scheduled and adhere to treatment. Two nurse navigators—one dedicated to breast health and the other to the geriatric

program—ensure that individual patients' needs are met. The cancer center also makes sure that patients' medical information is shared with all pertinent parties and coordinates appointment scheduling, particularly for those who are receiving adjuvant therapy. Scheduling staff are available on the first floor and work for all departments within the cancer center. This staff tracks treatment plans and schedules patients right away, eliminating lengthy wait times.

The Roger Williams Cancer Center medical oncology department is on the second floor and is staffed by three medical oncologists, one nurse practitioner, three medical assistants, two administrative assistants, and six fellows from the fellowship program. Each medical oncologist is paired with a medical assistant who helps with the overall operation of the medical-oncology clinic and provides support in obtaining patients' pre-certifications, imaging, and genetic testing. Next to the clinic, a 10-chair infusion suite is set up in a horseshoe shape with the nursing station at the center, allowing nurses to see everyone and quickly help if patients have an adverse reaction to their treatment. Both oncology and non-oncology infusions are administered at the cancer center, with a 6-chair area now reserved for patients receiving non-oncology infusions.

A dedicated 797-certified pharmacy on the first floor of the main hospital is staffed by two pharmacists and multiple pharmacy technicians. Due to the structure of

pharmacy services in Roger Williams hospital, staff are dedicated to the cancer center but report to the main hospital.

All surgical oncology services are performed in coordination with the cancer center and main hospital. With four surgical oncologists on staff, the cancer center offers general and breast surgical oncology, as well as surgical immunotherapy. Pre-operative work is done in the cancer center, and all surgeries and post-operative care are completed in the hospital. Patients return to the cancer center for follow-up care. The cancer center also has a dedicated laboratory, bone marrow infusion area staffed by two certified nurses, and minor procedure rooms for bone marrow biopsy restorations.

To keep patients close to home during treatment, the cancer center provides consultative services for medical and surgical oncology at four hospital-based satellite clinics in Lincoln, East Providence, Cumberland, and East Greenwich, R.I., all within a 25-mile radius of the cancer center. Each satellite location is staffed by an administrative assistant scheduler, a medical assistant, and a medical or surgical oncologist.

The East Providence clinic also provides infusion services in an eight-chair suite staffed by three oncology certified nurses. One pharmacist and one pharmacy technician make up the clinic's dedicated pharmacy.

Meeting Patients' Needs

Because Rhode Island is small and several nearby cancer centers share a catchment area, Roger Williams Cancer Center collaborates with its local competitors to ensure that its community receives a unified message on cancer care and prevention for melanoma, which is seen frequently in this state—a popular destination for outdoor recreation. The cancer center collaborates with other programs to develop a central message on skin care and melanoma prevention, promote community outreach,

and participate in melanoma screening throughout the state.

Rhode Island is also a popular state for retirees; patients 65 years and older make up about one-third of the cancer center's patient population. To tailor its care to best meet these patients' needs, Roger Williams created and implemented the Comprehensive Oncology Program for Elders. This program addresses the unique needs of older patients with cancer. It incorporates a comprehensive pre-treatment assessment that evaluates older patients in terms of their ability to maintain activities of daily living, their nutritional status, their cognitive deficiency, and their mobility. Intervention protocols exist for each of these clinical criteria, and, when necessary, patients are quickly referred to the necessary service(s) to ensure their access to care is seamless. Roger Williams Cancer Center is proud to be the only in the state to offer a comprehensive program for older adults with cancer.

The cancer center also offers its patients a variety of supportive care services, including occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, social work, nutrition, navigation, behavioral health, and support groups. All are available at its main location. Support groups and social work services are free to patients, and the other psychosocial services are billable. Patients can be referred to these services by their oncologist, medical assistant, or nurse or they can self-refer.

An Immunotherapy Research Focus

Roger Williams Hospital houses a protocol office and research office within its research department to offer clinical trials to eligible patients in the cancer center. It recently began offering immunotherapy clinical trials in collaboration with its onsite Core Lab Facility. All oncology patients complete a screening form with medical assistant fellows and protocol nurses as part of their initial consult. If an appropriate clinical trial

The Roger Williams Cancer Center staff take pride in the variety of services they offer patients and their ability to keep patients close to home while they receive treatment.

is available to a patient, the medical assistant fellows explain the benefits of participation and what is required to take part. Roger Williams Cancer Center currently offers Phase Ib and II immunotherapy clinical trials for breast, prostate, gastrointestinal, and solid tumors. It will be offering a human epidermal growth factor receptor 2-positive solid tumor chimeric antigen receptor T-cell trial. The cancer center enrolled 104 patients in a clinical trial from January 2019 to January 2020.

Richard Ballard, MS, executive director of cancer services at Roger Williams Cancer Center says that, even through the COVID-19 pandemic, all staff continued to work within the cancer center. They did not stop the necessary clinical and supportive care their patients needed. "I think that the compassion and the skill in which our staff takes care of our patients is very impressive," says Ballard. "Even when everybody else was working from home, our staff came in every day. They knew what we needed to be done, and they were just as compassionate as before." The Roger Williams Cancer Center staff take pride in the variety of services they offer patients and their ability to keep patients close to home while they receive treatment. 