

# spotlight

## Cancer Program at Parkland Health, Dallas, Texas



**P**arkland Health—one of the largest teaching and safety net hospital systems in the country—is home to the Cancer Program at Parkland Health, which offers specialized oncology services in Dallas, Texas. The program’s mission is to provide timely access to personalized, high-value care to individuals with, or at risk of, cancer and blood disorders in a safe and patient-centric environment. Parkland Health Cancer Program is accredited by the Commission on Cancer and recognized as High Performing in Cancer Care by *U.S. News & World Report*.<sup>1</sup> “We have a talented team of expert physicians and clinical staff dedicated to the care of our patients, many of whom are uninsured or underinsured and otherwise do not have access to healthcare,” said UMBER DICKERSON, MPH, administrative director at the Cancer Program at Parkland Health.

### Expanding the Program

In 2021 the cancer program moved into the new Moody Outpatient Center on Parkland’s main campus. This centralized location ensures that patients can be admitted to the hospital without incurring extra travel time and that cancer program staff can oversee patients when they are admitted. This new clinical space allows for multidisciplinary care integration and programmatic growth and was designed to be more inviting and provide a better environment of care for both patients and staff.

The cancer program’s outpatient floor comprises 66 exam rooms—shared by medical and surgical oncology staff—and one infusion suite. The 51-chair infusion suite is arranged in a circular format with a

combination of shared bays and individual patient bays facing the center. This design increases the privacy of patients and optimizes the workflow of nursing staff by allowing them to safely monitor multiple patients. An infusion-dedicated pharmacy is located within the infusion center where medications are verified and prepared on-site. The pharmacy has a dedicated IV room suite with five biological safety cabinets and two laminar flow rooms (non-hazardous rooms). There are two pharmacy consult rooms where patients receive patient education and ask questions of oncology pharmacists. Medication access specialists are available to help patients find programs and resources to help pay for their medications. Patients can also use the hospital’s full-service pharmacy located on the first floor to pick up additional prescriptions.

The Cancer Program at Parkland Health has an Oncology Acute Care Clinic for patients who experience side effects from their cancer treatment and require immediate care. Patients can call in to a nurse triage that assesses symptoms for acuity and schedules same-day appointments with an advanced practice provider, as needed.

The Moody Outpatient Center also houses the Moody Center for Breast Health, which includes breast imaging, breast medical oncology, and breast surgery clinics. The breast imaging department provides a full range of breast screening and diagnostic services in one central location, including mammograms, ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging, biopsies, stereotactic core biopsy, and the most advanced technology with 3-D mammography. The

breast cancer clinic has 18 exam rooms, two procedure rooms, provider workrooms, and a sub-waiting area for gowned patients. The breast health program also includes patient educators and a mobile mammography unit for community outreach.

### A Focus on Specialized Care

The Cancer Program at Parkland Health offers comprehensive inpatient and outpatient oncology services. Cancer care at Parkland is supported by clinical experts from the University of Texas (UT) Southwestern Medical Center’s Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center faculty. As UT Southwestern’s primary teaching hospital, the Cancer Program at Parkland Health incorporates teaching and non-teaching clinics dedicated to specific disease sites. The cancer program has 110 providers (e.g., faculty, fellows, advanced practice providers) in palliative care, medical oncology, surgical oncology, breast surgery, and gynecology oncology at Parkland. The cancer program employs 34 clinical support staff in both inpatient and outpatient settings, 92 nurses, 17 care coordination staff (e.g., nurse navigators and care coordinators), and 30 business support staff. All cancer surgeries are performed in the oncology-dedicated area of Parkland Memorial Hospital or its ambulatory surgical center, depending on the complexity and urgency of a patient’s case. Specialized surgical oncology teams treat many cancers, such as breast, esophageal, stomach, liver, bile duct, pancreatic, melanoma, and sarcoma.

In addition to established Parkland patients, the cancer program coordinates referrals from local for-profit institutions

and nonprofit organizations. Their navigation and referral coordinators ensure that the transition to Parkland is seamless and timely. Upon receiving a referral, a Parkland referral coordinator reviews patients' cases for financial clearance. If they do not have insurance coverage, the referral coordinator assists in finding and obtaining necessary financial assistance to cover treatment costs. Simultaneously, an assigned nurse navigator schedules patients for their multidisciplinary consultation and completes an orientation to ensure the patients are prepared for their visit and screen for any services the patient may need (e.g., childcare, transportation, and social work support).

Patients who require radiation services are referred to partnering sites to receive therapy. Parkland nurse navigators and care coordinators work closely with external partners to ensure patients' care is coordinated effectively and that they receive their full course of treatment if traveling between multiple locations.

After treatment, patients continue their care at the cancer program's survivorship clinics. During the first survivorship visit, patients will meet with a multidisciplinary team to help them transition into survivorship care. These clinics provide personalized plans for patients by helping identify and address any late or long-term side effects while ensuring proper cancer surveillance.

### Addressing COVID-19

Despite the challenges of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021, the Cancer Program at Parkland Health continued working toward an integrated model of care delivery, while providing high-quality care to patients through the extraordinary efforts of healthcare providers, nurses, and other clinical and support staff. The cancer program was the first of the specialty services at Parkland to provide COVID-19 vaccination during patient visits. For patients in active treatment who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, Parkland's COVID Outpatient Clinic's staff ensures patients continue to receive their cancer treatments following COVID safety protocols.

### Supporting Patients and Addressing Health Disparities

Staff are committed to eliminating inequities and disparities in cancer care delivery by identifying and addressing social factors and individual needs that impede patients' ability to engage in their care and adhere to treatment. As the safety net hospital in Dallas County, patients face barriers to care that include lack of access to transportation, cost, limited language and literacy proficiency, and childcare issues. Compared to the national average, Parkland's patients with cancer are younger, travel further distances to receive care, have a lower income and educational attainment, and have a higher rate of being uninsured or underinsured.

Approximately 68 percent of the cancer program's patient population lives about 25 miles from Parkland's main campus. Patients without a vehicle may spend two to three hours navigating public transportation (e.g., train and/or bus) to get to their appointments. When identified, these patients are referred to an oncology-dedicated social worker, who can help patients access bus passes, cab rides, and reimbursed transit fare costs.

Food insecurity has been shown to be higher among patients with cancer, in part due to the financial burden of cancer care on the individual and their families. Parkland's integrated oncology-dedicated dietitians offer personalized nutrition plans for patients based on their disease, food preferences, and food availability, connecting patients to external resources as needed. Additionally, an oncology malnutrition screening tool, created by Parkland staff, is completed during treatment for those who are at high risk for malnutrition (e.g., those with gastrointestinal or head and neck cancers).

In addition to providing dietitians and social workers, Parkland offers patients an array of oncology-dedicated supportive care services, including psychology, psychiatry, mental health counseling, genetic testing and counseling, a medication access program, durable medical equipment support, and financial counseling. Patients

have access to free body image, nutrition, and chemotherapy classes in both English and Spanish. Parkland has partnered with the Women's Health Boutique to create a support area where referred patients can access mastectomy bras, wigs, compression garments, and more.

According to Dickerson, "We will implement initiatives and expand our program to address the needs of our community. At Parkland, the cancer program staff seek to inspire hope for our patients, reduce disparities through equitable access to cancer care, foster research and innovation in healthcare delivery, and achieve exemplary outcomes through the delivery of comprehensive, integrated cancer care." 

### Reference

1. U.S. News and World Report. Parkland Health and Hospital System-Dallas. Accessed March 2, 2022. [health.usnews.com/best-hospitals/area/tx/parkland-memorial-hospital-6740950/cancer](https://health.usnews.com/best-hospitals/area/tx/parkland-memorial-hospital-6740950/cancer)

