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Assuring Access to Quality Cancer Care

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Assuring Access to Quality Cancer Care

From its inception in 1990, the Schumpert Cancer Treatment Center in Shreveport, La., was envisioned as housing medical, radiation, and gynecologic oncology specialties under one roof. The ability to provide these services in one setting has resulted in a more coordinated and convenient system

of care. What's more, the Cancer Treatment Center, which is connected to the hospital, gives patients access to hospital services without leaving the building.

The patient's primary point of contact within the Cancer Treatment Center are the physician clinics. Here patients are evaluated by a medical, radiation, or gynecologic

oncologist after being referred by the primary physician. The clinic's registered nurses supervise treatment and manage follow-up care. Lab work is performed within the facility, and all treatment modalities are available on site. This coordination of services is designed to save patients time and permit them to take advantage of other resources

Schumpert Medical Center, the second largest private hospital in Louisiana, serves the western parishes of Louisiana, as well as portions of Texas and Arkansas. Schumpert is a member of the Statewide Integrated Community Health Network, formed by its parent organization, The Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, and Ochsner Health Systems of New Orleans. The Network offers companies throughout Louisiana health care through a triple-option insurance plan that includes an HMO, PPO, and a general indemnity plan.

VITAL STATISTICS

- Total bed size: 625
- Dedicated cancer unit beds: 32
- New analytic cancer patients seen each year: 1,116
- Current number of patients on NCI-approved protocols: 38
- Managed care penetration in Louisiana: 7 percent

PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- Schumpert holds screenings for skin and prostate cancers as well as cancer risk assessment.
- Breast cancer awareness seminars and self-breast exam

certification are provided.

- The Schumpert Medical Center Hospice provides holistic care to patients and families.
- The Nutrition Department helps patients maintain the best nutritional status possible.
- Volunteer staff are comprised of cancer survivors or family

members of cancer patients and are available to greet patients, deliver flowers, and maintain and staff cosmetology services.

- The Center has two social workers, who are available to assist both inpatients and outpatients.



at Schumpert, such as cancer support groups and educational services. "We've found that patients want to be able to see four doctors and get an MRI without having to go across town or even across the street," explained Steven Hightower, M.D., medical director of radiation oncology.

The availability of specially trained gynecologic surgeons in a community setting allows access for all patients to the specialized surgical techniques and procedures usually found only in academic programs, according to Hightower. Patients at Schumpert have access to such procedures as radical hysterectomies or pelvic exenterations to surgically ablate cancer, which before would have required patient referral to Dallas, Houston, or Little Rock. Patients from as far as 300 miles away have been drawn to Schumpert as a result.

Schumpert's two GYN-oncologists joined the Center on a full-time basis in 1994. Initially there was concern that their presence would not be well received by the hospital's private practice OB-GYNs.

"As it turns out, they have been a great resource for the OB-GYNs," who are literally steps away from consultation with a GYN-oncologist, said Hightower. He reported that informal consultations between the two specialties take place frequently.

The close proximity of the medical, radiation, and gynecologic oncology departments within the Cancer Treatment Center enhances staff interaction and communication, according to Elaine Zipp, R.N., C.N.A., M.B.A., vice president of oncology services. New patient meetings are held once a week with representatives from all departments to review that patient's course of treatment, to acclimate the patient to all the services available, and to

coordinate functions of the three departments. The new patient is presented to the team, which includes the Center's social worker, chaplain, and dietitian, as well as medical staff. The ancillary staff make regular rounds to offer their assistance to patients.

Schumpert has also worked to provide quality care and convenient access for pediatric patients. In 1990 Schumpert became affiliated with St. Jude's Children's Hospital in Memphis, Tenn. As a result, children can often receive care at Schumpert instead of traveling six hours to St. Jude's for every treatment. Although trips to St. Jude's will never be completely eliminated, Schumpert hopes to further decrease the number of visits by hiring a full-time pediatric oncologist who will work at Schumpert in conjunction with St. Jude's.

By affiliating with St. Jude's rather than starting its own free-standing pediatric oncology department, Schumpert has access to St. Jude's sizeable clinical research department. "We are able to rely on St. Jude's expertise, *and* at the same time save our pediatric patients from making unnecessary trips," said Zipp.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

The philosophy at Schumpert is that *feeling* better is an important part of *getting* better. Twice a year, in April and October, cancer patients and survivors sign up for Camp Bluebird, an adult cancer camp located just over the Texas border, 20 miles away. For three days and two nights, the campers have a chance to forget about their illness and concentrate on having fun—sleeping in cabins, fishing in the lake, and going on scavenger hunts like kids at summer camp.

"When they're at camp, we like to refer to them as 'campers,' not

'patients,' " said Zipp, who noted that just three days at camp can have a long-lasting effect on people fighting cancer.

"The opportunity to go out and have fun greatly increases quality of life," she explained. Zipp firmly believes that enabling patients to get away from the realities of illness and treatment and to associate with others experiencing similar problems often results in a strengthened resolve to fight their disease.

The camp, which takes 35 campers each session, is funded by the Cancer Treatment Center, South Central Bell, and AT&T Pioneers. Staff at Schumpert and volunteers from the Pioneers' service organization take on the role of counselors and are paired with one or two patient "buddies." A hospital nurse oversees all campers and coordinates medications.

COOPERATION, NOT COMPETITION

Although physically connected to the Schumpert Medical Center, the Center works hard to maintain its own identity apart from the hospital. "Our outpatients don't like to think of themselves as going to a hospital for treatment. They want to feel that they are receiving treatment at a center that just happens to be adjacent to the hospital," Hightower explained.

Noting the physical proximity of the departments and the collegial, cooperative relationships that exist among physicians, Hightower is pleased with the high level of integration with the institution. Competitiveness among physicians so far has not been a problem.

"With our departments so close together, if we didn't cooperate, we wouldn't function at all. The atmosphere is really one of coming together and doing what's best for the patient." ■