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Reaching Out to a Rural Community

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Baptist Hospital of East Tennessee Baptist Regional Cancer Center

Reaching Out to a Rural Community

In five years, Baptist Regional Cancer Center has nearly doubled the size of its cancer program. Operating in a fee-for-service environment driven primarily by physician referral, the hospital has collaborated with local oncologists to facilitate access to quality care for Baptist's sparsely populated service population of 1.2 million spread across twenty-seven counties in eastern Tennessee. Baptist Regional Cancer Center

Director Richard Porter credits physician support as the catalyst that has driven the program's rapid expansion. Through informal, collaborative relationships with oncologists in the community, the hospital administration facilitates information sharing vital to outcomes management. Baptist's oncologists have a history of working with the administration to develop critical pathways and other utilization management objectives

related to the performance of the cancer program. According to Porter, both administration and physicians recognize they are interdependent and share common goals.

One group of oncologists with main offices located at Baptist directs 90 percent of its referrals to the cancer center. Within the past five years, the group has established eight satellite clinics throughout the rural eastern Tennessee region where

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Baptist Hospital of East Tennessee is a 438-bed hospital serving Knoxville and the surrounding areas. The Baptist Regional Cancer Center is one of five cancer centers in the country that conducted the earliest clinical trials with Taxotere. In addition, Baptist is the only Knoxville institution participating in Vanderbilt Cancer Center Clinical Trials. Vanderbilt is the only NCI-designated cancer center of its kind in the state. Baptist Hospital

has been an ACoS-approved Community Comprehensive Program since 1982.

VITAL STATISTICS

Total system-wide bed size: 570
Dedicated cancer unit beds: 15
New analytic cancer patients seen each year: 1,040
Managed care penetration in the state: 9.0 percent

PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

■ During Prostate Cancer

Awareness Week, nearly 400 men across six clinics in East Tennessee are screened each year. Free prostate specific antigen tests are included.

■ HomeCare of East Tennessee provides skilled nursing; home health aides; physical, occupational, speech, and infusion therapies; and nutritional consultations.
■ Baptist Regional Cancer Center participates in local American Cancer Society programs such as CancerNet and Look Good, Feel

Better. Grief support programs are offered on a monthly basis.

■ The Baptist Health System provides diet control, smoking cessation, and other cancer-related education programs throughout its network of senior centers.

■ The Senior Plus Club provides free parking, daily newspapers, and pharmacy discounts to patients 55 and older.



patients can receive chemotherapy on site and also have local access to Baptist's clinical trials network, including GOG, RTOG, and NBSG, as well as ECOG and NSABP trials through Baptist's affiliation with the Vanderbilt Cancer Center in Nashville. In 1993, Baptist established a satellite radiation therapy center located forty miles from Knoxville. The medical oncology group leases space from the center and provides chemotherapy on-site. Baptist recently applied for a certificate of need for an additional radiation therapy center sixty miles away. Porter noted the significance of this outreach venture: "From a care perspective, our satellite centers are providing care to a number of people who might not otherwise receive it. From an economic perspective, we were able to reach this underserved population early enough to control the market share."

Baptist has also established itself as a leader in GYN oncology care in Knoxville, with two board-certified gynecologic oncologists serving the program. The GYN oncology program, which draws patients from all over Tennessee and neighboring states of Virginia and Kentucky, offers access to this subspecialty.

Porter expects that the hospital and physicians will be ready for an eventual increase in managed care penetration. "We've established a foundation of cooperation combined with technical excellence that will continue to foster our growth."

PARISH NURSING AS OUTREACH

In 1994 Baptist incorporated the specialty of parish nursing into its efforts to extend health care and support services into the community. Carol Smucker, R.N., Ph.D., is

coordinator of Baptist's parish nurse program, which assigns nurses to church communities of various denominations to promote health and provide education to parishioners. Parish nurses undergo a three-week orientation to gain an understanding of the pastoral side of care. Orientation is divided into three parts: classroom instruction, home visits with parishioners, and on-site training at the assigned church. Parish nurses also undergo ongoing continuing education once they begin work at their churches.

The program is an extension of Baptist's clinical pastoral education program, which trains seminarians, pastors, and lay people to apply pastoral skills in the clinical setting. "Promoting health is viewed as a ministry as important as distributing food, providing clothing, or other services," said Smucker. The parish nurse program helps churches build upon their existing outreach services to support a health ministry.

The role of the parish nurse is to help prevent illness within the community, help people manage chronic illnesses, and increase the overall health awareness of the congregation. The parish nurse organizes special events such as health fairs, screenings, immunizations, and health education classes. Most events take place at the church or at senior centers. The parish nurse may also participate in the church's home visitation program to address the needs of the older members of the congregation and facilitate their access to health services. In all cases, the parish nurse follows up with individuals who may require examination by a physician.

Each church shares the cost of the program with Baptist Hospital of East Tennessee. In the first year, the church assumes 25 percent of

the nurse's salary and benefits, or about \$5,000, according to Smucker. The second year the church's percentage increases to 50 percent and in the third year to 75 percent. Beyond three years, the church covers the total cost of the program.

The parish nurse works out of an office at the church and is considered a church staff member. Generally a parish nurse works twenty hours a week and reports to the pastor. The nurse also participates in the parish's health committee, which is established to help plan and prioritize health-related goals for that parish. Parish nurses regularly document their work and meet monthly with Smucker. The hospital and the church jointly evaluate the parish nurse's performance on an annual basis. At present seven parish nurses are assigned to eight local churches.

Smucker recruits registered nurses who have had at least two years of nursing experience within the last five years, are active members of their churches, and have played some kind of leadership role within the church community. Ultimately Smucker looks for nurses who are interested in incorporating the spiritual into their nursing care. "I look for those individuals who consider nursing to be a calling, a ministry," said Smucker.

Smucker expects that hospitals and churches will find parish nursing to be a natural extension of their shared mission to provide for the health of the community. "This program works because we operate with a community structure—the church—already in place," Smucker said. "We didn't have to create a vehicle in the community to promote our health message." ■