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Holy Cross Hospital

A Renewed Commitment to Patients with Cancer

Holy Cross Hospital, located just outside of Washington, D.C., in Silver Spring, Md., has been a cornerstone of the community for more than 30 years. Renown for its maternal and child health care, the hospital has also built a strong community health education program to engage the community in screening, prevention, and educational activities across a spectrum of health-related issues.

Recently, a major strategic reorganization has prompted Holy Cross to build upon an existing framework of oncology services

that had been growing since the hospital's inception. Oncology is now positioned as one of five clinical strategic priorities of the organization. "We have always had the primary components of oncology in place," said Steven J. Shore, executive director of the cancer program. "Our initiatives have been driven by the need to integrate these components into a more comprehensive program."

This organizational restructuring reflects a renewed commitment to meeting the comprehensive needs of our community, added Linda Burrell, M.D., chair of the Cancer Committee. "Expansion of

these core components will further establish Holy Cross as a quality provider of oncology services close to home, where people live and work," she said.

Core oncology services include screening and prevention; 24-hour infusion; state-of-the-art radiation therapy; pastoral, supportive, and home care; and hospice. An interdisciplinary team of oncologists, oncology nurses, social workers, pharmacists, and registrars supports the program. Lymphedema support and a national clinical research program also complement hospital services, providing patients access to the latest in

Holy Cross Health in Maryland is the largest single provider of complex primary and secondary care in both Montgomery and Prince George's counties, serving almost 200,000 patients each year. The Holy Cross Health Cancer Program provides a comprehensive approach to caring for patients with cancer, from screening programs to hospice. With a highly skilled staff, a full spectrum of diagnostic services, and today's most sophisticated facilities, treatments, and therapies, Holy Cross Health provides exceptional care for cancer patients and compassionate support for their families.

VITAL STATISTICS


- Total hospital bed size: 412
- Number of analytic patients per year: 1,023
- Dedicated oncology unit beds: 26
- Managed care penetration in the state: 30 percent

PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- The Community Research and Outreach Fund of Maryland Regional Cancer Care facilitates patient access to cancer screenings, education, and clinical research.
- A bilingual cancer education center is open 24 hours a day and includes information on prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and support.

- Exercise programs specifically for the cancer survivor include Kripalu yoga, gentle yoga, and therapeutic massage.
- The annual Cancer Education Day includes free breast and prostate screenings, educational seminars, interactive health booths, and free vouchers for mammograms.





treatment and prevention protocols through the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP) and the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group (ECOG). The hospital is currently undergoing accreditation by the American College of Surgeons; formal approval is expected in the first quarter of 2000.

STEM CELL PROGRAM...AND MORE

With the hospital situated within a 30-mile radius of two NCI-designated comprehensive cancer centers, and with a number of local community hospitals also investing in oncology, Holy Cross has worked to differentiate itself in delivering comprehensive oncology services. Through the development of subspecialty or "niche" areas of oncology, the hospital expects to meet the needs of those cancer patients who are in need of more specialized oncology care. "Positioning our program as a hub for several areas of oncology will help us create a larger regional presence," Shore said.

In 1997, in conjunction with Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., Holy Cross initiated a peripheral stem cell program to build upon its existing activities in autologous bone marrow transplant. Harvesting patients' stem cells prior to treatment allows patients to then undergo higher doses of chemotherapy and/or radiation; after treatment, the stem cells are reintroduced to rescue the bone marrow from lethal toxicity. Holy Cross is the only hospital in suburban Maryland offering this service.

Stem cell treatment is extremely demanding for patients, both

physically and emotionally. Thus, a number of supportive care therapies have been integrated to enhance the stem cell program, including antiemetic relief, nutritional support, pastoral care, and psychosocial counseling.

Patient education is also a vital component. "The goal is to involve patients in their treatment, as early as possible," said Vern DeHaney, R.N., nurse manager for oncology. Pre- and post-treatment meetings with patients provide an opportunity for discussion about supportive care needs during treatment and for follow-up. "In order to make the stem cell transplant process most beneficial for patients, we need to encourage their cooperation in bringing about their recovery," she said.

Such a strong supportive framework represents Holy Cross's emphasis on customer service, both in terms of the quality programs offered and in staff interactions with patients. "Providing a support network is of course a vital complement to any cancer therapy," DeHaney said. "The key is having structured mechanisms in place to provide that support."

In 1999, the Holy Cross stem cell program sought accreditation from the Foundation for the Accreditation of Hematopoietic Cell Therapy (FAHCT). Upon initial survey, the program received the highest level of commendation that any hospital has received to date; no program accredited by FAHCT has received a higher level upon initial review. Only 14 programs nationwide have been accredited by FAHCT. Formal accreditation of the stem cell program is forthcoming.

ACCESSIBILITY EFFORTS

Holy Cross has also taken steps to better serve patients from neighboring communities. A partnership effort with Adventist Healthcare created Maryland Regional Cancer Care, the largest radiation therapy network in the state. With four freestanding radiation therapy centers all equipped to provide state-of-the-art radiation therapy, including 3-D treatment planning and conformal therapy, Holy Cross is in a better position to address the needs of patients living in areas to the south and east of the hospital, according to Shore. "These centers provide more convenient access to patients who may face transportation problems and other barriers to care," he added. In addition, patients who need transportation service to and from the four centers receive it at no cost. As part of the agreement, the hospitals established the Community Research and Outreach Fund to ensure patient access to critical components of oncology care such as cancer screenings, education, and clinical research.

The cancer program at Holy Cross continues to grow, with emphasis on providing a broad array of comprehensive oncology services, while at the same time addressing the more specialized needs of patients. Recently the hospital purchased MCD/FDG, a form of the highly advanced positron-emission tomography, or PET scan, a unique feature in a community cancer program, Shore pointed out. "With the proper tools in place, and a dedicated customer service approach, our patients can expect the best possible care here at Holy Cross." ■