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## The Carl & Dorothy Bennett Cancer Center

### Innovative Complementary Therapy Programs Offered

**A** multi-faceted cancer program at the Carl & Dorothy Bennett Cancer Center at The Stamford Hospital in Stamford, Conn., provides an array of complementary therapies and programs to enhance medical treatment. Cancer patients have the option to participate in Expression Through Art, a nutrition program, and a pilot exercise program for patients completing treatment.

Through its participation in the American College of Surgeons' National Cancer Data Base, and its clinical effectiveness studies, the cancer center continually monitors and evaluates its services to improve the hospital's cancer program. In addition to the outstanding clinical care delivered by the center's physicians, nurses, and technicians, a number of innovative programs have been implemented to round out oncology services. The Expression Through Art program was established in 1993, offering patients an opportunity to express themselves through art. The only prerequisite to join is "a sense of humor," said Lolly Murray, art program coordinator. Besides helping patients recognize and use new talents, the Expression Through Art program serves as an informal support group for patients and their families.

In addition to regular classes, project materials are often brought to patients on the inpatient oncology unit and to those receiving long-term chemotherapy. "It can really help make the day go by and give them something to focus on," Murray said. Since it began, more than 200 people have participated.

Besides individual projects, participants have created art for various locations throughout Stamford

Health System. A mural of brightly colored animal characters dressed in medical garb and carrying medical instruments is found in the pediatric waiting area in the operating room. The exam rooms at the Leslie and Roslyn Goldstein Pediatric Center have giant murals, which transform exam rooms into farms, aviaries, jungles, gardens, and underwater hideaways.

Seven murals create "windows" in the cancer center's group treatment room. In another windowless area, which houses one of the center's linear accelerators, five giant scenes are painted. Each "window" represents a point in the day, from sunrise to sunset, and goes from country, to city, to sea. One panel depicts the Bennett Cancer Center and radiation oncology staff.

Last year, a special program was started for pre-school age children whose parents were in treatment. The children created projects ranging from self-portraits to "wish fish." These papier-mâché fish with large gaping mouths store each child's special wishes. While the children created, their parents met next door with the center's psycho-oncology counselor to discuss issues and concerns around effective parenting while coping with a life-threatening illness.

Individual artwork has been displayed in The Stamford Hospital coffee shop and has been featured in the last three Bennett Cancer Center annual reports. The group also has produced a calendar for the last five years.

Recently, the Expression Through Art program has expanded to include musical concerts for patients, families, friends, volunteers, and staff. These concerts are held in the center's garden atrium.

#### REGAINING STRENGTH THROUGH EXERCISE

An innovative exercise program began in 1999 to help patients regain some strength, flexibility, and confidence in their bodies. According to Deanna Xistris, R.N., M.S.N., A.O.C.N., director of nursing for hematology-oncology at the Bennett Cancer Center, "with the advances in cancer treatment, many patients are cured, but undergoing treatment can be taxing on a patient's body. They experience fatigue and loss of strength." Patients taking part in the exercise program also benefit from a personal trainer and a nutrition consultation.

"This is the only post-cancer program in the region that focuses on strength training rather than aerobic exercise," said Mike Roberge, an exercise physiologist and fitness director of The Kneaded Touch in Fitness in Stamford. Patients lose body fat and gain valuable lean mass, both of which equate to strength.

"Although a cardiovascular workout is fine, it doesn't do much to develop lean mass" added Roberge. "We incorporate yoga to build flexibility and use a variety of non-traditional equipment such as balancing balls and rotating disks." Roberge also pointed out: "Many patients' goals are to be able to do things that most of us take for granted. They want to be able to drive again, or just reach out and pick something up. We are seeing them reach those goals."

#### NUTRITION EDUCATION PROVES VALUABLE

An integral part of the Cancer Risk & Prevention Program is nutrition education provided by Kirstin Magnuson, M.S., R.D. The program initially created for those



found to be at high risk for cancer is being used more and more by patients of the center. "Patients are eager to learn," said Magnuson, who offers advice on proper nutrition, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Her lectures stress the importance of getting nutrients from food and incorporating a diet of colorful fruits and vegetables into each and every day.

Feedback from participants encouraged the addition of the "Smart Cooks" series, a combination of cooking, demonstrations, taste testing, and lectures, focusing on cooking with vegetables, soy, and legumes. Taught by Jane Charon, M.S., R.D., the program covers buying, storing, and preparing foods. Each program ends with participants sampling the

dishes that were prepared.

The nutrition series and "Smart Cooks" series have nominal fees attached, with scholarships available. The other innovative complementary programs are offered free of charge to patients through the Bennett Cancer Center and are supported through fundraising efforts of the Stamford Health Foundation. ❏

*Stamford Health System (SHS) is a non-profit provider of comprehensive health care services in lower Fairfield County, Conn. Stamford Health System includes a number of different entities. The Carl & Dorothy Bennett Cancer Center at The Stamford Hospital provides a full range of outpatient services for cancer patients and their families. SHS offers the best in cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment, along with vital support services and education. In addition, Hospice House, a program of Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care of Southwestern CT, Inc., and the first hospice residence in Connecticut, will open this spring on The Stamford Hospital campus across from the Bennett Cancer Center.*

**VITAL STATISTICS**

- Total hospital bed size: 305
- Number of analytic patients per year: 750
- Dedicated oncology unit beds: 28 bed unit, general medical and oncology
- Managed care penetration in the state: 50 percent

**PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

- The Bennett Cancer Center provides support services and groups in conjunction with another

community agency, the Center for Hope. The two share a psycho-oncology counselor who provides individual and family counseling as well as leads support groups.

- Pastoral care services are provided by a chaplain shared with Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care.
- Research affiliations include

ECOG and NSABP. The Bennett Cancer Center is the only site in Fairfield County where patients can be enrolled in the STAR breast cancer prevention trial.

- A full-time cancer genetic counselor provides recommendations based on analyses of an individual's cancer risk. A number of research protocols are available.



The room housing the cancer center's linear accelerator is surrounded with a variety of landscape scenes that capture moments in the day from sunrise to sunset. The panel shown here depicts the Bennett Cancer Center at dusk. These murals were created by the center's Expression Through Art group.