

## Methodist Regional Cancer Center Methodist Medical Center of Oak Ridge

### Enjoying Diversity in a Caring Environment

**M**ethodist Medical Center was built by the U.S. Army during World War II to provide medical care for the scientists and general staff of the top secret Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge. Although originally a barracks-type facility, the hospital was a pioneer in nuclear medicine and today has state-of-the-art equipment, including a multileaf collimator and high-dose brachytherapy capability for lung and gynecological cancers.

Methodist Regional Cancer Center is located on the medical center's campus. The cancer center has tailored its programs to provide quality care and outstanding support services for an extremely diverse patient population that includes a large Hispanic community, the rural Appalachian communities surrounding Oak Ridge, and the 900 Ph.D.s and their families (in a town of 28,000) from Oak Ridge National Laboratory and nearby universities. Almost all of the support services are free.

Murals throughout the cancer center (including the treatment rooms) create a relaxing atmosphere and turn the entire center into a garden with wildlife, complete with a waterfall and the Cumberland mountains in the distance.

The center treats a significant number of lymphomas, both indolent and aggressive, and myelodysplasias in the elderly. While high-dose brachytherapy for both lung and gynecological cancer is offered, patients with gynecologic malignancies that require chemotherapy or specialized surgery usually see one of several gynecologic oncologists in Knoxville, 20 miles to the east. Pediatric malignancies are also referred out, usually to Knoxville's Children's Hospital.

Multidisciplinary tumor conferences are held weekly. One conference a month is devoted to breast cancer, and the rest cover a variety of malignancies.

Recently, Methodist received a \$90,000 grant to construct a separate lung cancer clinic. The goal is to take a patient from intake through evaluation by a thoracic surgeon, a pulmonologist, a medical oncologist, and a radiation oncologist in no more than two days.

The pain management program is characteristic of Methodist's keen focus on quality patient care. When the program began, administrators surveyed their nurses' attitudes toward pain, and staff education became the hospital's first priority. Pain control is now routinely addressed at staff meetings, in the unit newsletter, and during chart reviews. The hospital's graphic record was re-designed to include pain as a fifth vital sign, and patients are taught how to rank pain using the Whaley-Wong graphics scale (which is placed in every patient room). Aggressive pain control is started if patients rate their pain at 5 or more on a 1 to 10 scale. Charts are audited to monitor staff compliance.

#### MODEL CARE PATHWAYS

Over the last eight years, the hospital has created 33 CareTrax<sup>SM</sup> for a variety of conditions to upgrade care quality and reduce treatment variations. Oncology pathways include care plans for cancer symptom management and for patients undergoing surgery for breast and colon cancer.

The Comfort CareTrax<sup>SM</sup> for terminally ill patients has become a national benchmark. The program was created by a multidisciplinary team that wanted to offer oncology patients optimal symptom manage-

ment, choice, dignity, consistency, and meaning at the end of their lives. Symptoms are dealt with aggressively, and case managers follow patients on a daily basis to monitor outcomes, offer emotional support to patients and their families, and coordinate discharge planning. Patients receive help dealing with end-of-life issues, such as advance directives, whether to choose home care or institutional care, finishing life tasks, and mending broken relationships. Six to eight weeks after a patient dies, the case manager calls the family to offer support and bereavement counseling. The Healthcare Advisory Board in Washington, D.C., named the Comfort CareTrax program a "best practice in supportive care" in March 2000.

#### THE BREAST CENTER

The Oak Ridge Breast Center, housed across the street from the medical center, has an R2 image checker, ultrasound and mammography equipment, and the technology to perform bone densitometry. Mammogram results are returned on the same day the test is performed.

Staff at the breast center perform both stereotactic core and mammotome biopsies. Patients come back two to three days after a biopsy for an incision check and to find out their results, which are never given out over the phone. If the biopsy is positive, the breast center staff will have scheduled an appointment with a surgeon immediately after the follow-up appointment, and a patient care representative will escort the patient across the street to the hospital and introduce the patient to the new doctor. The patient's primary physician also receives a call.

Every new breast cancer patient

The Methodist Regional Cancer Center opened in 1995 and is a 17,500-square-foot, freestanding facility located on the medical center's campus. It serves 204,000 people in five counties of east central Tennessee. The American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer has given Methodist's oncology program the highest level of accreditation possible for a non-teaching hospital.

#### VITAL STATISTICS

- Total hospital bed size: 301
- Dedicated cancer unit beds: 40
- Number of new analytic cancer cases seen per year: 660
- Managed care penetration in the state: 40 percent

#### SELECTED PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- A variety of support groups and counseling services are available free of charge through The Wellness Community of East Tennessee.
- "I Can Cope" and other

has the opportunity to join a newly diagnosed breast cancer patient support group run by The Wellness Community on the hospital grounds. Patients receive the National Cancer Institute's 70-page booklet entitled *Understanding Breast Cancer Treatment—A Guide for Patients*, a copy of *MAMM* magazine's special issue called *Guide for the Newly Diagnosed: Breast Cancer*, and a 23-page booklet of questions to ask the doctor with space provided to record the physician's answers.

#### CLINICAL TRIALS

Patients have the opportunity to participate in numerous clinical



Murals throughout the Methodist Regional Cancer Center help create a relaxing atmosphere.

American Cancer Society programs are offered.

- Free, temporary housing for patients and their families who live more than 30 miles away is provided by the Methodist

Hospital Foundation's Hospitality House. The house contains four "suites" plus shared common areas, laundry facilities, and picnic equipment.

trials through Methodist Regional Cancer Center's affiliations with the Southwest Oncology Group and the Sarah Cannon Cancer Research Network. The hospital currently has two prevention studies (the STAR breast cancer prevention trial and one on prostate cancer that will open soon), and one study on how high-dose brachytherapy affects patients' quality of life. There are 38 treatment studies that cover a variety of cancers—from genitourinary malignancies to lymphoma, melanoma, multiple myeloma, and cancer of unknown primary. Patients can also enter trials run by the Thompson Cancer Survival

Center in Knoxville (a member of Covenant Health, which is Methodist's parent corporation).

Methodist Regional Cancer Center provides top-flight care for all its patients by celebrating the diversity of its unique patient base. Everyone the center serves has access to the best technology and the best kind of human concern at the same time. But the hospital is not the only place in the area that is focused on healing. A local commercial nuclear medicine facility is quietly making brachytherapy seeds for prostate cancer with government equipment formerly used in the nuclear fission process. The future looks bright. ☐