

Mobile Infirmiry Medical Center and the Cancer Center of Southern Alabama

Partners in Cancer Care, Leaders in Research and Outreach

Established in 1910, the Mobile Infirmiry Medical Center is the largest private, non-profit hospital in Alabama. Located along the central Gulf Coast, its closest urban neighbors with major research programs are New Orleans, La., 140 miles west and Birmingham, Ala., 270 miles to the north. The Infirmiry serves a region of a million people, both urban and rural, in southwest Alabama and eastern Mississippi. The central Gulf Coast area is noted for its shipbuilding and is popular with retirees. There is a significant population of people in this age group that has the highest incidence of cancer. The Infirmiry sees a large number of tobacco-related illnesses.

To meet a growing demand for comprehensive cancer services, the principal medical and radiation oncologists on staff at the Mobile Infirmiry joined together in October 2000 to form The Cancer Center of Southern Alabama (CCSA). Although the CCSA is an independent private practice and holds its own delegate membership in the Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC), the group maintains a close relationship with the Mobile Infirmiry Medical Center. Both ACCC institutions work to keep their interests aligned, which has allowed the development of an active and progressive cancer program for the region.

IMPRESSIVE PROGRAMS

The CCSA is located in a medical office building attached to the Infirmiry. There are four medical oncologists and three radiation oncologists in the practice who treat the entire range of solid tumors and hematologic malignancies. Eight oncology nurses staff the clinic and the 14 treatment chairs. To maxi-

mize efficiency and provide comprehensive services, the CCSA employs its own social worker and program coordinator/development director.

For inpatient care, the CCSA uses the Mobile Infirmiry's 27-bed inpatient cancer unit. In keeping with the concept of a combined program, John Feldmann, M.D., serves as medical director for the cancer program and for the inpatient unit.

The Mobile Infirmiry also has planning computers, a Varian 22X multileaf collimeter, and is in the process of bringing IMRT therapy online. Using the equipment at the Mobile Infirmiry, the radiation oncologists at the CCSA can offer stereotactic radiosurgery, radioisotope therapy, prostate seed therapy, and high-dose brachytherapy for pulmonary and gynecologic malignancies.

Although the technology is state of the art, John Russell, M.D., chief of the radiation oncology division of the CCSA, believes the strength of the division is in its personnel. "We have both a Ph.D. and a master's level physicist on staff," said Russell, "and we also have an in-house engineer, three dosimetrists, and four oncology nurses. It's an impressive line-up, but what's important is that they are all superb at their jobs and work well as a team."

CLINICAL TRIALS ARE A PRIORITY

On June 1, 2001, the Community Clinical Oncology Program (CCOP) at the University of South Alabama in Mobile was moved to the Mobile Infirmiry Medical Center by the NCI and renamed the Gulf Coast MBCCOP. The Mobile Infirmiry is now the only federally funded institution for clinical research between New Orleans and central Florida. Clinical trials from SWOG, the NSABP, RTOG, M.D.

Anderson, and the University of Rochester augment the longstanding research efforts of the hospital. The Mobile Infirmiry is also a member of the American College of Surgeons' Oncology Group and participates in the Sunbelt Melanoma Trial. A variety of pharmaceutical trials with an emphasis on novel therapies round out the research program.

The Gulf Coast MBCCOP currently runs about 60 treatment trials and several prevention and supportive therapy trials. It is minority oriented and is successfully soliciting trial participation in the African-American community, especially for the STAR and SELECT prevention studies. So far, even though it must provide follow-up for the 300 patients that were seen under its auspices at the University of South Alabama, the CCOP is more than meeting its accrual goals and satellite programs have been established elsewhere in Mobile and at the Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Mark Conrad, M.D., the former chairman of Hematology/Oncology at the University of South Alabama and the director of the CCOP in that location, now works for the CCSA and is the principal investigator of the Mobile Infirmiry program. While Conrad is Caucasian, he was one of the original members of the National Sickle Cell Council and a fully supported choice for principle investigator. Marcia Grove-Conrad serves as the director of the CCOP, a position she also held formerly at the University of South Alabama.

When the University of South Alabama decided to relinquish its NCI CCOP grant, Conrad suggested moving the CCOP grant to the Mobile Infirmiry to prevent the loss of valuable patient data. "I thought

The Mobile Infirmary Medical Center was established in 1910 and is the largest private, non-profit hospital in Alabama. It serves as a major regional medical center for the entire greater Gulf Coast area. The hospital has an American College of Surgeons-certified Comprehensive Cancer Program.

VITAL STATISTICS

- Total hospital bed size: 704
- Dedicated cancer unit beds: 27
- Number of new analytic cancer cases seen per year: 1,085
- Managed care penetration in the state: 15 percent

SELECTED PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- The American Cancer Society (ACS) offers "I Can Cope" as well as free wigs, laryngectomy bibs, breast prostheses, and prosthetic bras.
- ACS sponsors visitation program for new lumpectomy and mastectomy patients, and support groups for breast cancer patients (Bosom Buddies) and laryngectomy patients (Lost

it was criminal to deny access to the big national studies to a whole region of the United States," Conrad said. "We as oncologists, either in private practice or at university medical centers, have an obligation to engage in these studies to improve cancer care. Just after World War II most cancer patients died of their disease, but now we're curing more than 50 percent of serious cancers. It's been done a little step at a time with this kind of research. You don't get paid for it, but you have the satisfaction of giving something important back to society."



- Chord Club) are also offered.
- Stretch is a low-impact aerobic exercise program for post-mastectomy patients.
- The Total Life Care Resource Center features a lending library with brochures, audio and videotapes, and books on health care. Seminars on health issues are offered monthly.
- A monthly cancer support group is open to recently diagnosed patients and survivors, their friends, and families.
- The Tell-A-Friend educational breast cancer program encourages individuals at high risk of developing breast cancer to get a mammogram.
- The Guesthouse is a 20-room facility at the hospital for families of inpatients, outpatients who want to arrive the evening before a procedure, and discharged

OUTREACH

Rural outreach is another priority of both the Mobile Infirmary Medical Center and the CCSA. While the CCSA is a private practice, it is devoted to bringing good cancer care to all parts of the Mid-Gulf Coast region and already has centers in Daphne, Monroeville, and Atmore, Ala. The Monroe County Hospital and the CCSA are in the process of raising funds to create a cancer center in Monroeville, and both the CCSA and the Mobile Infirmary are looking at new ways to partner in an effort to solve



Eight oncology nurses staff the 14-bed chemotherapy treatment area at the Cancer Center of Southern Alabama. Inset, state-of-the-art radiation oncology.

- patients who are not ready for the drive home.
- Other services include a lymphedema clinic, infirmary home health agency, and home hospice care. ☐

problems of rural medicine (especially the distance factor) and bring state-of-the-art care to remote areas. The Mobile Infirmary and the CCSA have joined together to offer their patients a host of support services and also bring the latest patient information and public education resources to southwest Alabama. Both ACCC institutions are committed to working together on the common goal of building a major community cancer center dedicated to patient care, community outreach, and comprehensive clinical research. ☐