healing with a human touch

The BOND between PATIENT and NAVIGATOR is powerful MEDICINE

Baylor Patient Navigator
Cynthia Robinson-Hawkins

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For most people, a cancer diagnosis is the beginning of what could be the longest, most trying ordeal of their lives. With treatment often entailing visits to numerous specialists, surgery, countless tests, rehabilitation and follow-up care, cancer can affect every part of a patient’s life. Worse still, the outcome is uncertain.

However, the new Baylor Charles A. Sammons Cancer Center, which opened March 26, is making the road from cancer patient to cancer survivor smoother. As the largest outpatient cancer center in North Texas, the facility offers comprehensive diagnostic, treatment, support, education and research for cancer patients and their families.

“There is no reason for cancer patients to leave North Texas for cancer care. In fact, we want to be a destination cancer center,” says John McWhorter, president of Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas and senior vice president of Baylor Health Care System. “The way we think that will be accomplished is not only with facilities and advanced technology, but also by attracting the top cancer physicians as well as scientists and researchers – people conducting clinical trials, actively working on a cure for cancer.”

While finding a cure for all cancers is the ultimate goal, the cornerstone of the new Baylor Sammons Cancer Center is providing comprehensive care in one convenient location. Often, cancer patients have to go to one facility for their diagnostic work, another facility for part of their treatment and yet another for follow-up care. This means having to find their way in a new place, deal with new staff and sort through a whole new set of paperwork at locations that could be spread across town or across the world. The whole process would be quite a challenge even for the healthy. For someone who is gravely ill, it’s an additional hardship that can be overwhelming.

“When we designed our new center, we visited some of the nation’s top cancer hubs, so we could bring what was best about them home to North Texas,” explains Donna Bowers, J.D., vice president of oncology for Baylor Health Care System. “Cancer may be a journey, but patients shouldn’t have to travel thousands of miles from home to receive quality care each step of the way. And with the new cancer center, they don’t.”

**SUPPORTING SPIRIT AND SOUL**

Bowers, who oversaw the design and construction of the new Baylor Sammons Cancer Center, is a breast cancer survivor. She knows firsthand the hardships, fears and needs that cancer patients and their families face on a daily basis.

“Comprehensive care means not only seeing to all the body’s medical needs, but caring for the mind and spirit of each cancer patient, as well as giving their families all the support, information and inspiration they need,” Bowers says. “The entire facility was designed for patients and their families.”

“We want to be the hospital that walks with the patient every step of the way.”

The 10-story building was constructed with lots of open floor space and windows, allowing natural light to pour through. The walls are painted soothing earth tones. There is a beautifully landscaped outdoor healing garden with benches that provide patients and their families a peaceful place for reflection. A chapel also is available to patients and visitors with a chaplain on call 24/7.

There is a cancer resource library with books and videos open to patients and families, so they can learn more about their disease and treatment options, as well as a special gym used for a supervised patient exercise program. The new cancer center also offers a program for spiritual and emotional healing, which includes classes on journaling, relaxation, art, music, yoga, aromatherapy and many more.

“With the new facility, we’ve really been able to expand our patient and family support services,” Bowers says. “It even has a demonstration kitchen so our registered dieticians can teach healthy but delicious cooking to patients and families so they’re not stuck with the same bland diet cancer patients are often prescribed.”

All the clinical and support programs the new cancer center offers were planned to add up to one thing: total care that patients and their families can count on when they feel as though they are drowning. It’s the lifeline they can turn to for advanced cancer medicine and advanced cancer support.

**EXPANDING A TRADITION**

For more than a century, Baylor has strived to provide the best possible health care to the community. The new Baylor Sammons Cancer Center is continuing to fulfill that promise by offering the warm, personal touch and technologically advanced healing for which Baylor is known.

“We want to be the hospital that walks with the patient every step of the way,” McWhorter says. “It doesn’t matter where they are on their journey – whether they come to us for their initial diagnosis, treatment, follow up, after care, survivor clinics, or integrated therapy-we are here to help them every step of the way.”

Bowers agrees and adds, “I like to think of our new outpatient cancer center as 10 stories and 467,000 square feet of quality, compassion and hope for cancer patients and their families.”

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When Alice Hand was diagnosed with cancer, she called Baylor Charles A. Sammons Cancer Center and Cynthia Robinson-Hawkins answered.

“It changed my life,” Hand says.

Hand was devastated when diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer and unrelated colon cancer. “So many things cloud your mind and so many problems come up on you at one time,” says Hand.

That’s where Robinson-Hawkins stepped in.

Robinson-Hawkins is a registered nurse with an MBA and manages Baylor’s Patient Navigation Program – a service that provides one-on-one assistance with every aspect of care; from diagnosis to treatment and recovery.

“Cynthia did so many things, some might say simple things but things that were so important to me,” Hand says. “I didn’t feel well and I was scared half to death.”

Robinson-Hawkins knows how overwhelming it is to deal with cancer. She was diagnosed with breast cancer 22 years ago and had no idea what to expect when her treatment began.

“I remember a tech coming into my room to take me for a scan. I argued with him and said he had the wrong patient,” she says. “There wasn’t anyone there to explain to me the process of what would be happening and why. I said then, this should not happen to anyone else.

“Cynthia was always there, she was always ready to answer questions and concern! She was there every step of the way,” Hand says.

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“The bond between patient and nurse navigator can be an important component to recovery.”

The bond between patient and nurse navigator can be an important component to recovery.

Cynthia Robinson-Hawkins hugs patient Sheilli Sherrell below.

To this day I still follow-up with Alice,” Robinson-
THE NEW HOME FOR HOPE

When it came to designing and building the 467,000-square-foot Baylor Charles A. Sammons Cancer Center, inspiration came from some very important people. “We decided we would build a cancer center around patients and their families,” says Donna Bowers, vice president of oncology for Baylor Health Care System. In fact, patients played a prominent role in designing the facility by sharing ideas in focus groups. “We were able to integrate most of them,” Bowers says.

The center features original artwork, including a large piece displayed in the Pauline Allen Gill Foundation Atrium. A 3,200-square-foot chapel is a comforting place for prayer and spiritual reflection. A healing garden with soothing water features and walking path provide a natural retreat where patients, family members and caregivers can relax and rejuvenate. A new café and coffee shop serves an expanded menu of dining options. A new demonstration kitchen will feature chefs and nutritionists who specialize in tasty foods designed to meets the dietary needs of cancer patients. Family areas and a spacious outdoor terrace provide ample seating. The library offers the latest information on cancer research and treatment options, access to desktop computers and an array of popular magazines. Abundant natural light, soothing earth tones and natural stone and wood create a calming atmosphere that brings the outdoors in. Ernie’s Appearance Center offers an expanded line of products catering to the special needs of cancer patients.

Caring for the body, mind and spirit of each and every cancer patient.
The past few decades have seen unprecedented advances in the field of cancer care. The tools specialists have at their disposal are rapidly evolving, becoming ever more effective and efficient. With a better understanding of the disease, it has become increasingly clear that no two cancer patients are exactly alike.

“The most effective treatments are usually the ones tailored to each patient. That’s why it’s important to have a wide range of diagnostic, treatment and support options available.”

At the crux of all the center’s clinical programs is evidence-based medicine backed by advanced research. They are designed to be disease-specific, patient-specific and adhere to rigorous standards of quality. For instance, the new outpatient cancer center houses the W.H. & Peggy Smith Breast Center which has received full accreditation from the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NAPBC). The accreditation is only awarded to those breast centers that provide the highest level of quality breast care confirmed by an intense evaluation.

The NAPBC achievement recognizes the skill of the breast center’s staff, as well as a commitment to offering technologically advanced treatments and diagnostic options such as the positron emission mammography scan. This new imaging equipment can detect the subtle changes in breast tissue that may elude older technologies.

“Catching breast or any other type of cancer early is one of the best ways to achieve a positive outcome. Of course, avoiding cancer altogether is the most ideal scenario,” says Dr. Miller, referring to the breast center’s Hereditary Cancer Risk Program.

The program offers genetic risk assessments for breast and ovarian cancer, and options for preventing cancer when possible and catching it early when it’s not. Genetic testing for colon and rectal cancer also is available at Baylor Sammons Cancer Center.

Besides providing nationally recognized breast care, the new Baylor Sammons Cancer Center also has allowed Baylor to grow its programs for other types of cancers. The facility is home to the Baylor Liver and Pancreas Disease Center, Head and Neck Cancer Clinic, Bone Tumor Clinic, Baylor Sammons Lung Cancer Center and the Skin Cancer Evaluation Clinic, among other specialty cancer programs. These clinics and centers have specialists on the medical staff who focus their careers on one or a very limited number of cancer types.

To stay at the forefront of cancer care, physicians on the medical staff at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas regularly meet at site-specific tumor conferences.

“The conferences give physicians a chance to learn and discuss the latest information on a particular type of cancer and consult on individual cases. This promotes a team approach to caring for patients,” Dr. Miller says.

COMBATING BLOOD DISEASES

Baylor Sammons Cancer Center features the ninth-largest Blood and Marrow Transplant program in the country with a comprehensive range of services to treat blood cancers, lymphomas and myelomas.

“Over the past 27 years, our Blood and Marrow Transplant program has helped more than 4,000 patients through adult bone marrow and peripheral blood stem cell transplants,” Dr. Miller explains. One of those patients was Roxanne Graves, who suffered from Hodgkins lymphoma.

Cancer invaded all of Graves’ lymph nodes and had already progressed to Stage 4 by the time she began treatment. But thanks to the quality care she received at Baylor, the cancer went into remission.

However, as an insurance policy, while it was in remission, physicians harvested her blood stem cells in case the cancer returned. When it did nine months later, her medical team was ready, performing a peripheral blood stem cell transplant with her own stem cells.

“It definitely saved my life,” Graves says. “Compared to other hospitals that I have the option to go to, my very first choice is Baylor based on the excellent care and service.”

Graves and thousands like her have received life-saving and life-extending cancer care at Baylor. The new Baylor Sammons Cancer Center is able to provide more people the same opportunity to access advanced treatment options closer to home.

COMPLEMENTING MODERN TREATMENTS

Cancer is a complex beast. A multi-faceted approach to healing – not limited merely to the latest drugs and technology – is key to caring for the whole person.

Baylor Sammons Cancer Center has answered with its Integrative Medicine program, the first of its kind in North Texas. It focuses on each patient’s concerns from a “natural” viewpoint. It’s a complementary program that addresses nutritional, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of the healing journey, using techniques that in some cases are thousands of years old.

“The program doesn’t downplay all the incredible advances in traditional medicine that are offered here,” says Carolyn Matthews, M.D., medical director of the new program and a physician on the medical staff at Baylor Dallas. “This is a way to supplement or integrate existing treatment options with ‘low-tech’ approaches that have proven effective for centuries.”

Integrative Medicine is a highly personalized, holistic way to alleviate many acute and chronic conditions, including conditions resulting from cancer or cancer treatment such as pain, nausea, fatigue, anxiety and neuropathy. Therapies may include massage, acupuncture, nutritional guidance and much more.

“Together, the integrative therapist and patient evaluate the type of cancer being treated and examine alternative therapies. Then a program is built to fit each patient’s unique needs,” explains Dr. Matthews, who has completed an Integrative Medicine fellowship.

Through Integrative Medicine, approaches to lifestyle, diet, exercise and mind-body medicine are combined with modern medicine to optimize health and healing.
CANCER RESEARCH GETS PERSONAL

Every cancer diagnosis is life changing. But finding out no effective treatment exists or an attempted treatment has failed can be devastating.

“We want to be able to offer hope to patients whose cancer has resisted standard treatments, and a lot of times that hope comes in the form of a new clinical trial,” says Dr. Alan Miller, chief of oncology, Baylor Health Care System, and medical director, Baylor Charles A. Sammons Cancer Center.

“That’s why we’re opening the Innovative Clinical Trials Center – to bring patients clinical research that may not be available anywhere else, or only available at a limited number of facilities in the world.”

The Innovative Clinical Trials Center (ICTC), opening in June at Baylor Sammons Cancer Center, is the centerpiece of cancer clinical research at Baylor. The ICTC will recruit promising clinical trials with a special focus on recruiting Phase I clinical trials – clinical research freshest from the lab. The ICTC will match patients in need with appropriate trials, giving them access to newer agents, or trials investigating other aspects of cancer care.

“Eight hundred Baylor patients participated in trials in 2009, and of those, about 10 percent were Phase I trials. I expect that number to greatly increase with the ICTC,” Dr. Miller says.

True to Baylor’s philosophy of providing individualized care, much of the research going on at the ICTC and Baylor Sammons Cancer Center will center on personalized medicine – sometimes called precision medicine. Precision medicine is a very promising line of cancer care that tailors treatment to the biology and genetics of each individual patient’s tumor. To this end, the ICTC has brought aboard Daniel Von Hoff, M.D., as an advisor.

Dr. Von Hoff is an internationally renowned cancer researcher who has played a role in the development of more than 200 cancer drugs and served on President George W. Bush’s National Cancer Advisory Board. He will help guide the ICTC, and bring highly sought Phase I trials and studies to Baylor, as well as skilled physician scientists.

“We are thrilled to have Dr. Von Hoff work with us,” Dr. Miller says. “He has an impeccable reputation as a cancer researcher and is considered to be a leader in personalized medicine and that’s what we intend to be.”

CLOSING OLD WOUNDS: A PATIENT’S STORY

Bob Barker only had been married to his wife, Deborah, for five years when he received the bad news profoundly altering the happy couple’s life together. In 1991, the Flower Mound resident was diagnosed with advanced leukemia.

“All the plans we made had to be put on the back burner. And it was such an aggressive form of leukemia that I wasn’t given a great chance of surviving,” Barker says.

Barker turned to Baylor Dallas where he underwent a bone marrow transplant, chemotherapy and radiation therapy that sent his cancer into remission. After a brief relapse and follow-up treatment, he joined the proud ranks of cancer survivor. However, complications soon arose.

Barker developed an acute case of graft-versus-host disease (GVHD), a condition common among bone marrow transplant recipients where the transplanted marrow attacks the body. “It started off pretty mild with some skin problems like discoloration, but soon it moved to my ankles and feet,” he explains. “It really made the skin around my ankles and feet tight, and then the skin cracked and open wounds started appearing on my feet and lower legs.”

It wasn’t long before the GVHD spread to his esophagus causing it to contract, making it difficult to swallow, eat and take his medications.

For almost 10 years, Barker was able to effectively control his GVHD through powerful anti-inflammatory steroids. However, long-term steroid use can pose other serious health risks, and in 2000, he was forced off the medication. Things took a turn for the worse.

“My graft-versus-host disease got so out-of-control that I wasn’t able to work and had to go on long-term disability,” Barker says.

Over the next decade, he tried several different treatments, including participating in clinical trials. One trial involved weekly visits in Dallas, then traveling once a month to a cancer center in Houston for follow-up assessments. “I did that for two years and didn’t have much success with it to be honest,” Barker claims.

Then he was referred to a GVHD clinical trial at Baylor. In June of 2010, Barker enrolled and began receiving weekly infusion treatments at Baylor Dallas. The trial has recently moved to the new Baylor Sammons Cancer Center.

For Barker, the results so far have been nothing short of astounding. “When I started the clinical trial, we weren’t sure what kind of response I’d have, but this is the most response we’ve had so far. My esophagus has healed up, and my skin has loosened up considerably. The wounds on my feet and ankles have drastically reduced in size – some have even healed up completely.”

Up until the trial, Barker was virtually housebound and had to have assistance walking. Now, the future seems wide open.

“We’ve had good success, so we’re going to keep going to see if we can get rid of it completely,” Barker says. “The trial has given me hope that I can eventually get back to doing the things that I like doing like sports and living an active lifestyle.”
Excellence that’s close to home.
At Baylor, we’re proud of the national and local recognition we receive. It means our efforts toward health care excellence are not going unnoticed.
But it’s not about us. It’s about you and the confidence you find in turning to an award-winning cancer program for your family’s health care needs.

Cancer. We’ve got its number.

90,000 cancer visits annually
300 cancer care specialists
100+ clinical trials
467,000 sq. ft. dedicated facility
35 years of innovative care
9 cancer care locations
#1 consumer choice in North Texas
#1 blood and marrow transplant program in North Texas

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