

# spotlight

## Katmai Oncology Group, Anchorage, Alaska



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**K**atmai Oncology Group is the largest oncology practice, as well as the only Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI®)-certified practice, in the state of Alaska. Located in Anchorage—which is home to more than 40 percent of the state’s total population—the physician-owned community oncology-hematology practice offers on-site chemotherapy and has its own laboratory facilities.

The practice is located on the third floor of the Providence Cancer Center, which is part of the Providence Alaska Medical Center campus. The practice space boasts a sweeping mountain view of the Alaskan landscape, just one of the features designed to enhance the patient experience and create a calming environment of care. Offering a holistic approach to treating the “whole patient,” the practice features an integrative medicine suite with a soothing waterfall feature. Supportive care services include integrative medicine (acupuncture, massage therapy), palliative care, survivorship counseling, social services, financial counseling, and access to the only oncology-certified dietitian in the state of Alaska. Navigation services, available to all Katmai Oncology patients, are performed by clinic nurse navigators.

### Bringing Quality Oncology Care to Alaska

Founded in 1973, by Dale Webb, MD, Katmai Oncology Group was the first practice of its kind to serve the patient population of Anchorage, and Dr. Webb is credited with providing medical services that were

previously unavailable in Alaska. Today, Katmai Oncology Group continues to expand. The practice is now staffed by:

- Six oncologists
- Six oncology nurse practitioners
- A psychiatric nurse practitioner
- Eight clinic nurse navigators
- Infusion nurses
- A social worker
- An oncology-certified dietitian
- Two massage therapists
- An acupuncturist.

All of the practice nurses are OCN-certified.

Survivorship is a new service offered by Katmai Oncology Group as of 2014. Currently, survivorship care plans are prepared by nurse practitioners for colorectal and breast cancer patients. In the coming year, the practice intends to add survivorship services for lymphoma patients.

Practice physicians participate in a breast tumor board that meets twice a month; a brain tumor board and a thoracic tumor board, which meet monthly; and a city-wide multidisciplinary tumor board that is held weekly for any cases that do not fit into the aforementioned disease sites.

Although the Katmai Oncology Group is a completely separate entity, the clinic is housed in the Providence Cancer Center. The proximity of services does have benefits. Katmai refers patients to the Providence Cancer Center’s oncology rehabilitation program, utilizes local research staff, and also works closely with the hospital’s radiation oncology group (for high-dose rate brachytherapy and Tomotherapy services). This close relationship and being physically

located in the cancer center ensures a smooth coordination of care.

### Bridging a Care Gap

Katmai Oncology Group continues to grow to meet patient demands. In addition to serving the area surrounding Anchorage (a city with a population of 300,000), the practice also operates a satellite infusion clinic (opened in 2012) four days a week in Soldotna on the Kenai Peninsula, which is about 150 miles south of Anchorage. Offering oncology services at the Soldotna Clinic was due to patient demand, and the care access issues experienced by the rural patient population inspired Katmai to bring their services to them.

“The peninsula is definitely rural. Access to care is a barrier down there. Patients were reluctant to make the trek to Anchorage for care,” said Dr. Shannon Smiley, one of Katmai’s practicing oncologists. The clinic is a 15 to 20 minute flight from Anchorage or a three-hour drive. “It seemed, anecdotally, that patients coming in to the clinic were also experiencing other health issues because they may not have sought any medical care prior to a cancer diagnosis,” said Dr. Smiley.

### Improving Patient Access to Clinical Trials

In December 2014 Katmai Oncology Group joined the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) Network as its eleventh affiliate in the greater Northwest. By joining the SCCA Network, Katmai Oncology Group oncologists can now offer their patients expanded access to cancer treatment options via select



SCCA clinical studies without the patients having to travel to Seattle to participate. This affiliation also provides support for Katmai's community-based oncology services by arranging for local patients to enroll in clinical trials managed by qualified community physicians. Katmai Oncology Group currently accrues about seven percent of patients to clinical trials annually.

### **Incorporating New Technology**

Katmai Oncology Group is working toward incorporating new technology with a goal of helping to streamline patient care access. According to Dr. Smiley, the practice hopes to begin performing telemedicine in the

coming year. Achieving this goal will not only enhance the care of local patients, but may also help to ease the travel burden for patients living in rural locations. Another step in improving the patient experience is the adoption of a patient portal. Currently, the practice uses the My Care Plus patient portal. Through the portal, patients can access their personal health records at any time and view educational videos on a variety of topics including pain management, "chemo-brain," managing distress, and more. Katmai Oncology Group is also currently beta-testing a cloud-based EHR, which Dr. Smiley said would allow providers smartphone access to the EHR, a particular

benefit for providers who cover a large and rural geographic area. 

### **Select Support Services**

- Navigation
- Oncology dietitian
- Financial counseling
- Palliative care
- Survivorship

Number of new analytic cases seen in 2014: 680