

spotlight

WellSpan Good Samaritan Sechler Family Cancer Center Lebanon, Pennsylvania



Opened in January 2016, the new WellSpan Good Samaritan Sechler Family Cancer Center brings high-tech, integrated cancer care to the small community of Lebanon, Pa. One of six cancer centers in the WellSpan organization, the Sechler Family Cancer Center is also Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI®) certified and accredited by The Joint Commission.

Prior to building the new one-story cancer center, oncology services were offered at Good Samaritan Hospital, located two miles from the new building. For hematologist Karla Ludwig, MD, access to integrated care in one location has made a difference in patients' lives. "It's very exhausting to have cancer. To be able to provide patients all of their services under one roof, especially a beautiful one like this, allows us to provide good, integrated care," said Dr. Ludwig.

Meeting Patient & Community Needs

The Sechler Family Cancer Center is truly a one-stop shop for cancer care, with medical oncology, radiation oncology, financial counseling, and supportive care all housed in the building. It's also situated close to other physician offices that patients may need to visit, including cardiologists, pulmonologists, and surgeons. All patients treated at the Sechler Family Cancer Center meet with the on-site Masters-prepared social worker. They are also seen by a registered dietitian upon starting treatment, chemotherapy, or radiation.

The on-site financial coordinator plays a huge role in assisting patients with obtaining coverage for their treatment and/or

prescriptions. Last year, the financial coordinator was able to obtain \$1.5 million in co-pay patient assistance for patients in Lebanon County.

Every time a physician orders oral chemotherapy, that referral immediately goes to the financial coordinator. He will then meet with the patient and determine what the cost of this drug will be, what coverage the patient has, and what assistance may be needed.

A referral to the financial coordinator can also be triggered by the nurse navigator. If a patient's initial assessment reveals distress fueled by financial worries, the navigator can immediately refer the patient to the financial coordinator.

"Patients will often ask [to be referred] but typically staff or the physicians are going to pick up on the need quicker than the patient. The coordinator is available and he'll step in often before patients are even aware there may be a problem," said Kelly Smith, MS, RN, OCN, oncology program director, Sechler Family Cancer Center.

Reflecting the Surrounding Community

In addition to taking patient convenience into account, the design of the center also reflects patient comfort and a sense of community.

"This area is a beautiful farm community. The architect did an amazing job with reflecting the bucolic setting we're in while also making it look high-tech. This cancer center really reflects the countryside," said Dr. Ludwig.

"The building that we are in is designed

to immediately set patients at ease. It is a very beautiful, peaceful place for patients to come for treatment," said Robena Medbery, MD, medical director for radiation oncology services.

With a building dedicated solely to cancer care, some services, like radiation oncology, have been able to grow. "We have the latest TruBeam™, and a program called Sun Nuclear PerFraction which gives an automated analysis of daily portal dosimetry. It detects and reports setup reproducibility and monitors linac delivery consistency on every patient, every day. We're finding this technology is only available at a handful of centers and it's usually academic centers," said Dr. Medbery.

The Sechler Family Cancer Center is also able to offer patients SBRT. The WellSpan organization includes several other radiation facilities that work in collaboration. Since the different teams perform weekly chart rounds together, patients get the opinion of multiple radiation oncologists for their treatment.

Staff and patients alike appreciate the infusion center's design. The infusion area contains nine privately separated bays overlooking a water feature resembling a pond, with each bay also containing two comfortable chairs for family and friends. "We really wanted to bring the outside in. All bays have glass windows from the ceiling down to the floor with the chairs positioned to look out onto the water feature," said Smith.

Another key design element of the building is the recognition and visibility of the community donors who helped make the new cancer center a reality. "Patients that walk through see all the donors that made

generous contributions to making this place beautiful. The lobby was donated by a family from the area, we have a spiritual center that was donated by another family from the area, and a Peace Garden donated by yet another family. Every one of the infusion bays has the donors listed so these people are familiar to the patients that come here,” said Smith.

One unique feature of the new cancer center is the hitching post out front. “We do take care of the Plain community here, Mennonite and Amish, and most of them arrive in buggies so we have a hitching post for them,” said Dr. Medbery.

Responding to a need within their patient population, the hospital employs a liaison for the Plain community. “There are different religious and cultural beliefs here, and we’re working to establish trust with the Plain community,” said Dr. Medbery.

Lebanon County also has a large Hispanic population and to reduce any language and cultural barriers, the cancer center has translators who accompany patients on their visits, rather than using a call-in phone service.

Navigation is Key

Patient navigation at the Sechler Family Cancer Center is structured to put patients at ease. Navigation begins even before the initial visit for a new patient. When a newly-diagnosed cancer patient calls to make their first appointment the oncology-certified nurse navigator fields the call and assists the patient with scheduling.

The nurse navigator accompanies new patients to their initial visit and helps them coordinate care both within the cancer center and with other physicians and other specialties as needed.


Acting as the patient’s point of contact throughout the treatment journey, the navigator helps coordinate the appropriate diagnostic studies and in the event of a positive biopsy, works in tandem with the certified diagnostic navigator at Good Samaritan Hospital.

The nurse navigator also initiates survivorship care plans upon the patient beginning treatment. Between the navigator and the oncology certified nurses, the care plan is completed and the patient meets with the navigator upon the completion of treatment to review the care plan.



The Sechler Family Cancer Center partners with the local YMCA to offer a breast cancer survivorship program called Pink Complete. The program includes exercise, nutrition, and relaxation techniques with a YMCA-certified cancer recovery trainer. In addition to breast cancer patients, the certified trainer will also individually work with patients who have completed chemotherapy and want to work on getting back to their previous level of fitness.

The cancer center recognizes that completion of treatment is an important occasion to celebrate with patients. Two brass bells hang on the walls of the Sechler Family Cancer Center, one in the infusion area and one in the radiation oncology area. Often when patients are completing their therapy, they bring family members in and ring the bell and celebrate with the cancer team.

Two flatscreen televisions also hang on the walls in these areas. Dubbed “Survivor Screens,” these televisions display former patients’ pictures along with some words of wisdom they want to share with others. 

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