

spotlight

Fauquier Health Center for Cancer Care Warrenton, Va.



The Fauquier Health Center for Cancer Care is a hospital-based facility located in Warrenton, Va. The cancer center and the infusion center are located on the main level of Fauquier Hospital. The hospital itself sits at the top of a hill at one of the higher altitudes in Warrenton, making it a visible landmark from anywhere in town. As patients and visitors enter the hospital, they will find the infusion center and medical oncology suite immediately to the left. The infusion center, staffed with oncology certified nurses, has an open design with a total of 11 chairs in separate suites. The open layout has been well-received by patients, though they can also use drapes should they want privacy.

“Patients feel like they are getting a university type of experience with a multidisciplinary consultation but they get it in the luxury and comfort of a community setting,” said Syed Salman Ali, MD, medical oncologist at Fauquier Health Center for Cancer Care. Dr. Ali describes Fauquier’s patient population as “mixed,” with a portion that is truly rural in north Virginia, and a large portion that is suburban, residing just outside Washington, D.C.

The cancer center hospital setting offers an obvious advantage to patients in the event of either an emergency or should inpatient services be required. “Our focus is making sure people are treated on the outpatient side and keeping them in their beds at night. Sometimes you can’t do that. Sometimes you have to utilize the hospital,” said Dr. Ali.

This built-in advantage allows for a seamless transition to inpatient care. “For

example, you don’t have to call an ambulance to take someone in. We’re able to put patients in a wheelchair and take them ourselves directly to the emergency room, and we will literally take them and hand them off to our emergency room colleagues within a matter of minutes,” shared Dr. Ali.

Medical oncology services are located in a suite on the hospital campus. Radiation oncology services are provided offsite in a separate practice located just down the road from the cancer center. The radiation oncology center is owned by a health system partner of Fauquier Health, LifePoint Health.

Between the advanced interventional radiology suite on campus and the radiation oncology services off-site, Fauquier offers a number of cutting-edge therapeutic services, including 3D mammography, RapidArc, and stereotactic radiosurgery (SRS). Dr. Ali hopes that with a new interventional radiologist on staff, the cancer center can begin offering yttrium-90 locally to patients with liver disease.

All other care services are built into the cancer center infrastructure, including pharmacy, nursing, and a lab. On-site supportive care offerings include *Look Good, Feel Better*, cancer support groups, a grief support group, chaplain services, nutrition and exercise counseling, Reiki therapy, and pet therapy.

Patient financial assistance is a team effort handled on a case-by-case basis. The providers, billing department, pharmacy, and patient navigator work together to try and mitigate patients’ financial burdens. This includes helping patients access

assistance with drugs, co-pays, or obtaining insurance coverage. Fauquier Health is currently developing a formalized relationship with a patient assistance program to identify at-risk patients early during a screening process to capture those who may eventually require help.

The Importance of Navigation

According to Dr. Ali, the cancer center’s navigation program has evolved tremendously with the hiring of oncology nurse navigator Richard Shrout, MSN, RN. “The word is out in the community that we have a patient navigator. We will often get referrals from patients themselves or from providers referring patients to our navigator for various cancers,” said Dr. Ali. Typically, when new patients with cancer diagnoses come into the cancer center, they will meet with the navigator during their first or second visit, and then the navigator becomes part of the work flow going forward. The oncology nurse navigator helps to facilitate all the necessary appointments and referrals to get patients plugged into the healthcare system and on a path of smooth, coordinated care.

One potential community need Fauquier identified was in regards to time from a suspicious mammogram finding to biopsy. With the navigator as a part of the care team, the radiologist can now alert the oncology nurse navigator to a suspicious finding. “I’m called in to talk to the patient, introduce myself as the nurse navigator, follow them through screening, and if they’re diagnosed with cancer, I will get them into the oncology program,” said



Opposite: Fauquier Hospital; Above Left: Oncologist Dr. Syed Salman Ali and oncology nurse Lois Sutphin, RN, discuss treatment options with a patient in Fauquier Hospital's Infusion Center; Above Right: Richard Shrout, MSN, RN, talks with a patient about her cancer care plan.

Shrout, thus helping improve coordination of care.

The addition of the navigator at the start of the treatment journey has had a measurable impact. "It dramatically shortened the amount of time from patients being notified they had a bad finding on a mammogram to actually getting a biopsy. In some cases, patients had been waiting up to a few weeks to meet with a surgeon for a biopsy, and we were able to shorten that time down to one to two days. The net result is that patients are getting a diagnosis and a formalized treatment plan and starting their definitive therapy much faster," said Dr. Ali.


Engaging Patients

Even though clinical trials are not available on-site yet, both Dr. Ali and the oncology nurse navigator screen almost all patients for clinical trial eligibility. By having good working relationships with other cancer centers in the region, such as the Georgetown Lombardi Cancer Center, Fauquier Health Center for Cancer Care is able to refer willing patients to larger systems with robust trial options.

"I will try to identify the best tertiary center for them and get them to those sites as soon as possible for a clinical trial evaluation. That's probably the easiest way to do it as a community site. Because we don't offer trials on-site yet, you don't want to limit your patients' options," said Dr. Ali.

Fauquier Health Center for Cancer Care providers participate in a variety of monthly multidisciplinary tumor boards: breast, GI malignancy, GU malignancy, and head and neck. In addition, a non-specific monthly general tumor board meets for a deeper dive into several additional cases.

Dr. Ali and his colleagues are also currently piloting a monthly tumor board for more complex cases. Currently, one patient per month is invited to meet with the group post-conference. The patient and family meet with the whole multidisciplinary team at once and receive a formal consultation and opinion. Patients are not charged for this visit, which allows them to ask questions and get answers from the entire care team. "This is doctors in our disciplines, taking time out of their day, taking on one complex case, and giving the family an extra hour—sometimes more—of time," said Dr. Ali.

Dr. Ali is hopeful that as the cancer center grows its infrastructure, this type of tumor board can meet more frequently and invite more patients to attend. "We've had some really fantastic feedback. Patients generally bring their families since it's a very unique experience, and we've heard nothing but wonderful reviews about it. What we've heard specifically is that patients felt that all of their potential questions were asked and answered. They were able to talk to all of their participating providers at the same time," he said. 

Select Support Services:

- Navigation
- Chaplain
- *Look Good, Feel Better*
- Support groups
- Nutrition counseling

Number of new analytic cases in 2014: 242.