

spotlight

Oncology San Antonio San Antonio, Texas



Oncology San Antonio is a network of community-based cancer care practices treating patients from San Antonio, Texas, and outlying areas. With five practice locations (Medical Center and Live Oak led by Zulfi Jaffar, MD; Downtown and Stone Oak led by Jayasree Rao, MD; and Mission Trail led by Syed Raza, MD) spread throughout the San Antonio region, patients do not have to travel more than 10-15 miles to access one of the practices. According to medical oncologist Zulfi Jaffar, MD, this careful geographic dispersal of the Oncology San Antonio offices allows the group to have a large footprint in the community, while also being convenient for the patient population.

"A lot of times you'll see practices or offices that are set up to be convenient to the physician who works in the office. In our situation, we intentionally wanted to make sure that our clinics were located where patients needed them," said Dr. Jaffar.

Patient-Centered Care

In addition to reducing the travel burden for many patients, Oncology San Antonio also put a great deal of thought into the cancer patient experience. For example, during the construction of the Medical Center in 2004, stakeholders stressed patient comfort as an important factor in building design.

"When we moved into this building we had a lot of construction done to make it aesthetically pleasing, including oversized waiting areas with bright colors and lights, free Wi-Fi, complimentary snacks and drinks; features that could help ease the conditions and environment of our

patient's treatment," said Dr. Jaffar.

The staff of Oncology San Antonio strives to provide a personal touch to patient care. All employees, including front desk receptionists, medical assistants, and nurses, are handpicked by the physicians.

"We strongly believe that if a person has cancer, they should be treated by a team that is most empathic with their condition. We do not want our patients to just feel like a number," said Dr. Jaffar. He continued, "each and every member of our staff make sure we take care of patients as if they were a member of our own family. We want to make sure our patients don't have to remember 10 things when they leave. We want to make it as easy an experience for them as possible."

State-of-the-Art Services

The Medical Center office, one of the locations where Dr. Jaffar practices, is one of the larger locations and includes Oncology San Antonio's business office. In addition to providing medical oncology services, the Breast Institute, a collaboration between Oncology San Antonio and the Aurora Breast Center, is also based in the same building. Comprehensive breast care is provided by a dedicated nurse practitioner, Dr. Jaffar as the medical oncologist, and radiation oncologist Jui-Lien "Lillian" Chou, MD. The Breast Institute offers the only dedicated breast MRI in San Antonio.

Oncology San Antonio also performs a high number of screenings for breast cancer, as well as genetic testing. The Medical Center practice location has had the highest number of patients undergo genetic testing

in all of south Texas for some time. Test results are interpreted by providers who are qualified to review and counsel patients.

Medical oncology services are offered at all five practice locations and include infusion, chemotherapy, antibody therapy, immunotherapy, and iron transfusion. Radiation oncology services are offered at three of the five practice locations.

Staffing across all locations includes five medical oncologists, two radiation oncologists, seven nurse practitioners, and more than 100 support staff. Physicians participate in multidisciplinary tumor boards for breast cancer, head and neck cancer, and geriatric oncology.

Infusion services are provided at all locations—spacious areas with about 10 chairs plus additional seating for family members. A separate area for patients who have requested a bit more privacy includes semi-private bays as well as one completely private room.

Pharmacy technicians also work on-site, and Oncology San Antonio is currently working on plans to add an in-house pharmacy at the Live Oak office to dispense drugs with a full-time pharmacist joining the team. The in-house dispensing pharmacy should go live in early 2017.

As for cancer research and clinical trials, Oncology San Antonio has fostered a relationship with nearby MD Anderson Cancer Center. "At the community level, where we are, we believe our resources are best directed to helping the patients directly rather than spending those resources in building up a research program when we

(continued on page 24)



(continued from page 22)

have access to one of the best research programs in the world,” said Dr. Jaffar.

Oncology San Antonio maintains close relationships with MD Anderson physicians, so when treating a patient who can better benefit from a research protocol, it can refer the patient to MD Anderson for any investigational drugs. Dr. Jaffar estimates the practice sends about 10 percent of the patient population to MD Anderson for clinical trials. All of the required follow-up care after the trial, including any blood work or additional treatment, is performed by the care team at Oncology San Antonio.

Connecting with the Community

According to Dr. Jaffar, a large portion of Oncology San Antonio’s patient population is elderly. Many of these patients are on Medicare and do not have secondary insurance, making drug costs a significant barrier to accessing treatment. “The cost of

drugs is enormous. Take, for example, colon cancer, where the cost of one year of treatment is between \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year. Twenty percent of the total care cost is almost impossible for most people to afford,” said Dr. Jaffar.

To help cancer patients with costs associated with treatment, Oncology San Antonio offers financial assistance support. Patient service representatives work on-site at each location to help patients receive the financial assistance they need. The representatives are in direct contact with many different community and national organizations, as well as pharmaceutical companies, to help patients pay for the treatments they require.

Financial assistance through the representatives also gives patients help with other basic needs, such as transportation to and from appointments (via the American Cancer Society Road to Recovery program) and utility bills. “Our patient service reps are

extremely active and they have certain programs in the community that help with the elderly; and it’s not just limited to their drugs, it’s their entire lifestyle. Patients are very appreciative of those programs,” said Dr. Jaffar. 

Select Support Services

- Financial assistance
- Genetic testing
- Support groups
- Transportation and lodging assistance

New analytic cases seen annually: nearly 1,600.