

spotlight

The Park Nicollet Frauenshuh Cancer Center, St. Louis Park, Minnesota | Simplifying the cancer care process for patients



The story is one that is familiar to many cancer programs: fragmented oncology services, increasing patient volumes, and space so tight that closets are converted into physician offices. Oncology leadership and administration recognize a significant need for change. In the case of Park Nicollet Frauenshuh Cancer Center, the solution was unique. Why not bring everything to the patient? Prior to that solution, cancer care was being provided in two locations: Methodist Hospital and Park Nicollet Clinic in St. Louis Park. Oncology services were set up in what Mark Wilkowske, MD, medical director of Frauenshuh, described as a very typical way. A check-in area, a waiting area, a laboratory, doctors' offices, a treatment area—all the different components of care that patients had to travel to; many times all in one visit. Wilkowske and the cancer team saw the opening of a new center as a chance to implement an innovative “non-moving patient” strategy.

Going “Lean”

The program used the LEAN quality improvement process to remove errors, waste, and inefficient processes to streamline services and better serve patients and their families. As part of the LEAN process, administration held a week-long focus group prior to building the new center. A group of physicians, nurses, administrators, receptionists, architects, patients, and quality improvement specialists mapped out the existing care process to see how patients transitioned during their

course of care. The focus group measured how many feet patients had to walk, the time spent waiting, and the amount of energy they expended while going through the care process.

“This idea came to mind: what if we just had patients arrive, and go back to a room and have everything come to them?” said Wilkowske. The plan was for patients to experience the infusion process, blood draw, the nursing evaluation, the doctor visit, the treatment itself, and then the check-out process including future appointment scheduling without ever having to venture to any other part of the cancer center. Even integrative therapy services such as massage, healing touch, acupuncture, and music therapy would travel to patients in their treatment rooms.

The cancer care team piloted the program prior to building the new center—mock treatment rooms were set up for nurses, clinicians, front desk staff, and patients to test drive—and received positive feedback from patients and staff alike.

According to Laura Holasek, administrative director of Frauenshuh, the vision for the new cancer center was a calm healing environment to decrease the patients' stress as much as possible while conserving their energy. The cancer center could not look like your traditional healthcare setting.

In 2009 the new 47,100-square-foot Frauenshuh Cancer Center opened its doors, inviting both patients and staff to experience a new model of delivering cancer services. In 2011 the cancer program received accreditation with commendation from the

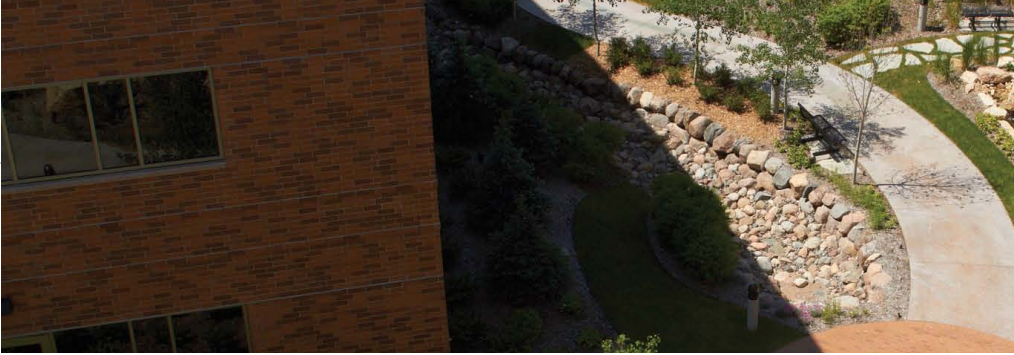
ACoS Commission on Cancer (CoC) and also earned Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI) certification from ASCO. Frauenshuh is the only cancer program in Minnesota to receive QOPI certification.

Quality Care in a Soothing Environment

The new center design incorporates as much natural light as possible along with soothing, earth-tone aesthetics. Patients and visitors enter through large glass doors and are immediately greeted by staff at the welcome desk. Adjacent to this area are volunteer services. Once patients are checked in, volunteers escort them directly to their treatment or exam room. Volunteers make sure patients are comfortable and offer them a pillow or blanket. The cancer center has more than 60 volunteers, many of whom are cancer survivors. Holasek said these volunteers offer not just a friendly face for patients, but also a level of understanding and deep commitment to the center from the volunteer staff.

Treatment rooms feature large windows that not only provide natural light but also offer views to the outside, reducing the feeling of being confined in a clinical setting. Scenic views are available throughout the facility benefiting both patients and staff. A wall of windows in the second floor staff break room overlooks the cancer center's healing garden.

One thing you won't find at Frauenshuh is an area with a straight row of 10 plastic chairs. The facility has several smaller sitting spaces for a cozier feel, as well



Number of analytic cases: 2,139

Select Support Services:

- Social Work
- Resource Library
- Support Groups
- Patient Navigation
- Integrative Therapy
- Palliative Care
- Patient Advisory Board
- Genetics Counseling
- Financial Services Representative.

as a garden room that includes views of the healing garden for friends and family members of patients to enjoy. Patients and visitors can meander through the tranquil healing garden as well.

Just about everything patients could need is located on the ground floor of the center, which facilitates ease of access for patients as well as an open, functional environment for staff to work together. The center design includes a special parking area for radiation patients with a door that leads directly to that department. "Patients receiving treatment can park easily, come right in, do self check-in, and get their treatment and get on with their day with as little interruption in their lives as possible," said Wilkowske.

The radiation oncology department is staffed by 3 FTE radiation oncologists, 2 FTE radiation oncology nurses, 2 FTE dosimetrists, 6.6 FTE radiation therapists, and 3 FTE physicists. State-of-the-art technology offered includes PET/CT, Varian 21EX linear accelerator, 21IX linear accelerator, and Novalis® shaped beam robotic surgery. Right down the hall is the medical oncology department staffed by 12 FTE medical oncologists and 14 FTE oncology nurses. Breast and general (incorporating GYN and brain) tumor boards meet weekly, with GI and Lung meeting about twice per month. The center is also staffed by 23.5 FTE treatment nurses, 3.3 FTE nurse practitioners, and 18.1 FTE frontline staff.

Adjacent to the radiation oncology and medical oncology departments is the pharmacy, psychotherapy services, psychiatry, and a chapel. Next to the center's entrance-way is a dedicated meeting room for patient support and education groups.

A Better Way

In the past, one complaint patients voiced was that the chemotherapy chairs were uncomfortable. For the new non-moving patient model to succeed, Holasek knew that chair comfort was

essential. "If we were going to provide a non-moving patient model for patients and for clinicians that chair also needed to lie flat like an exam table," she said. After doing research, they found that the chair they needed didn't exist on the market. The cancer team worked with a national design company; heavily involving patients and staff in the chair creation process. The resulting chair looked and felt like a comfortable recliner, allowing patients to put their feet up and control heat panels, but when it came time for the clinician exam, the chair could unfurl into a flat exam table.

Another tool instrumental in the success of the non-moving patient care model is Frauenshuh's electronic patient tracker. "Because the patient isn't moving we're not seeing the patient wait in the waiting room or seeing them in the lab or standing in front of the scheduling desk," said Holasek. The patient tracker identifies for staff where patients are in their care process; whether medication is being prepared for them or if they're waiting to see the clinician. This electronic system has helped the cancer team identify delays in the care process.

48-Hour Promise

While implementing the non-moving patient model was a significant commitment to providing patient-centered care, Frauenshuh has continued to look at ways to improve the patient experience. An issue that patients continued to bring up was wait time until their first appointment. Frauenshuh set a goal to get newly-diagnosed cancer patients in to see a doctor within the first 48 hours of diagnosis. So far, the cancer program has kept this promise, an achievement in which they take pride, but Wilkowske acknowledges that at times it can be a stretch. "It's been a point of controversy and discussion amongst the oncologists at various times along the way but overall we've continued to be very, very

committed to the goal," he said. One of the adjustments made by the center was providing more guaranteed appointment slots for the 48-hour promise for newly-diagnosed patients. Overall, Wilkowske said patients are appreciative of this system and amazed at how quickly they can see an oncologist.

Research & Education

In 2011 the Frauenshuh Cancer Center accrued approximately 19 percent of its patients to clinical trials. Having an oncology research department conducting research studies right in the cancer center has been instrumental in this impressive accrual rate. The center's research nurses proactively seek patients to enroll in studies, often pre-reviewing charts and checking patient calendars to see what study opportunities are available so they can inform the oncologist prior to the patient's visit. Frauenshuh is also a part of the Metro CCOP system.

The cancer center's patient advisory board is very involved in outreach and education and is currently helping to create a new care guide for patients. Their focus going forward is helping to support the patient through learning and education in multiple modalities such as video, written material, discussions with staff and clinicians, and support groups.

Though the Frauenshuh Cancer Center boasts a robust and innovative program, it is constantly striving to better serve its patient population. "As our volumes grow, we want to continue to balance this innovative process that we have with the needs of the community," said Holasek. 