

spotlight

Inova Schar Cancer Institute Fairfax, Va.



Transforming the massive headquarters of one of the world's leading energy companies into a state-of-the-art, multidisciplinary cancer center is no small task. That was the discovery of Northern Virginia's Inova Health System after it acquired ExxonMobil's former headquarters building for the new home of its cancer center. But the effort was well worth it.

Created to accommodate 6,000 new patients a year with a plethora of clinical and support services, the \$400 million Inova Schar Cancer Institute—which opened its doors May 13, 2019—occupies 438,000 square feet of space located off Washington, D.C.'s Capital Beltway. The institute was created in response to the continuing population growth in the area and the rising incidence of cancer in the community. The institute was largely made possible by a \$50 million gift from Dwight and Martha Schar—the largest single donation that Inova Health System has ever received.

Inova Health System includes an integrated network of five hospitals, primary and specialty care practices, emergency and urgent care centers, outpatient services, specialty institutes, and a broad network of providers and services. The new cancer institute, which provides both inpatient and outpatient services, is the flagship location of a cancer care network that covers all of Northern Virginia and serves the broader Washington, D.C. metro area. It is located across the street from Inova's largest hospital, Inova Fairfax Hospital. Despite the fact that it overlooks the Capital Beltway and is right off a busy main road, the cancer institute is removed from traffic and

somewhat secluded, on a private campus with dedicated parking lots and garages.

Refurbishing the new space to serve as an all-in-one cancer center for patients and their families required completely rethinking the building, says Thomas Graves, MBA, FACHE, vice president of the Inova Schar Cancer Institute. "It was a real challenge to repurpose the building," he recalls. "ExxonMobil was very security-conscious, and we had to redesign the entire building to open it up for patient care." That redesign included installing escalators and supplying water to the entire building. Work on the ExxonMobil headquarters began in January 2016, and it opened as the Inova Schar Cancer Institute in May 2019.

The location and sheer space the building provided proved to be well suited to the health system's vision for its comprehensive cancer care center. The addition of the location to its campus has enabled Inova Health System to bring under one roof its multidisciplinary approach to personalized cancer care. Special attention was given to the building's design, which incorporates works of art by local artists throughout the facility and an art gallery with rotating exhibits. Inova's Artists in Residence program welcomes various artists to share their music and poetry.

The new cancer institute also serves as the working space of a network of physicians, researchers, oncology nurse navigators, genetic counselors, scientific partners, and supportive care experts. It also is one of the sites for Inova's Life with Cancer program, which provides cancer education, integrative therapies, wellness programs (including

nutrition and exercise), and supportive counseling to patients and their loved ones free of cost, regardless of where they are being treated. The facility also offers spa services that can provide much-needed relief from treatment side effects. Read more about Inova's Life with Cancer program in the March-April 2018 *Oncology Issues*.

A Suite of Clinical Services

Operating the Inova Schar Cancer Institute requires a significant number of staff. The cancer center serves a densely populated region and is projected to see 7,000 new patients by 2020. Serving that population are more than 1,000 employees whom Inova directly employs, including more than 50 physicians, 15 advanced practice providers, 75 nurses, 23 pharmacists, and 20 financial counselors.

The clinical care the Institute offers is comprehensive, allowing patients access to a variety of disciplines, including specialty surgeons, radiation oncologists, genetic counselors, researchers, nurses, therapists, and volunteers. There are a wide variety of treatment options, including the 70,000-square-foot Center for Advanced Radiation Oncology and Proton Therapy, scheduled to open in January 2020. To bring its patients the most innovative treatments and technologies available, the Inova Schar Cancer Institute:

- Serves as a site for the groundbreaking TAPUR trial being conducted by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.
- Creates personalized treatment plans for patients with advanced cancers with the

cancer institute's Molecular Tumor Board.

- Counsels patients concerned about personal and family health history through its Cancer Genetics Program.

The cancer institute's suite of treatment options customizes life-saving therapies for people dealing with all types of cancers. Some of these therapies include immunotherapy, "chemo bath" for abdominal cancers, cryotherapy, prostate seed implants, and stem cell transplants, to name a few.

Patients at the cancer institute also have access to dozens of ongoing clinical trials. Scientists conduct genomic and translational research with their clinical and scientific partners around the world. The cancer center offers clinical trials across cancer types and all phases of research and development. Graves says that last year the cancer center participated in nearly 50 trials. "Our services are founded on the latest in drug discovery, clinical trials, research, and advanced treatments," says Graves.

The Inova Schar Cancer Institute is also home to 11 disease-specific programs, including its Brain and Spine Tumor Program, Breast Cancer Program, Children's Cancer Program, Genitourinary Cancer Program, Lung Cancer Program and programs for melanoma, gastrointestinal cancers, and malignant hematology.

When first-time patients arrive at the new building, a centralized registration system helps them navigate the space. "To avoid overwhelming the patient, we have each person register at the same place on the first floor," explains Graves. "When a new patient arrives, he or she sees one of our 20 financial counselors. These counselors help determine benefits and discuss options if necessary. When patients are taken to receive treatment, we have eight Life with Cancer oncology navigators to help guide them." These navigators are registered nurses who support patients, their families, and caregivers through diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. Nurse navigators serve as a personal resource to each patient, explaining and expediting medical tests and answering questions across cancer types.

A Home for Patients and Families

"Life with Cancer began with a philanthropic gift in 1988 from a gentleman who had lost his wife," says Graves. "He wanted to create a program with support services that were not available to him and his family when his wife was ill. The program integrates a variety of supportive, research-informed services and classes to improve the psychological and physical well-being of patients, adults, children, and their families, including a psychiatrist/psycho-oncologist, counseling, educational classes, oncology navigation, integrative healing, art therapy, massage, acupuncture, fitness programs, stress management, and nutritional counseling."

Graves says that Life with Cancer's ongoing operations are primarily funded by generous community donations. "We are grateful for the longstanding community support and dedicated volunteers who have enabled Life with Cancer to offer most of its services for free to any patient, regardless of where they receive treatment," says Graves.

As one of the sites for Inova's Life with Cancer program, the cancer institute hosts several of its services, providing patients with access to mediation rooms, exercise rooms, a medical spa, and therapist offices. The Life with Cancer Family Center, a 16,000-square-foot home-like space, is located a few minutes from the new campus, providing convenient access to additional comprehensive supportive programming, a significant differentiator for Inova Schar. Using an evidence-based, integrative approach, the program's multidisciplinary staff of almost 50, who possess diverse skill sets and specialized training, provide support throughout a patient's continuum of care. Programs are offered in the following areas free of charge:

- Children/teen/parent services
- Educational classes related to side effects, disease, and treatment
- Psychiatry (which accepts all major healthcare insurance programs)
- Oncology nurse navigation, including pre-op classes
- Individual/couples/family counseling



- Nutrition counseling
- Stress reduction
- Integrative therapies
- Support and networking groups
- Art therapy
- Fitness
- Mind/body/wellness
- Workshops
- Acupuncture (special reduced fee for this service)
- Oncology massage (special reduced fee for this service)
- Energy therapies
- Bereavement.

Programs and services are customized to patients and caregivers of all ages and all stages in their cancer journey, including the newly diagnosed, those in active treatment, those transitioning to survivorship, and those living with advanced disease. Other services are tailored to children and teens, young adults, and family and friends of patients.

"Inova Life with Cancer is a national model of supportive, integrative care that surrounds a patient with the support, education, and skills they need during treatment and as they transition back to a normal life," says Graves. "We don't want people to be crippled by fear of a relapse. We want to give them the tools they need to continue to live their lives."

The creation of Inova Schar Cancer Institute has enabled Inova Health System to gather under one roof all of the clinicians and support staff necessary to support patients with cancer and their families through diagnosis to treatment to survivorship. "This multidisciplinary and personalized approach to cancer care makes us unique in our ability to give patients and their families the option of receiving all of their care in a single location," says Graves. 