

spotlight

Portneuf Cancer Center Pocatello, Idaho



Portneuf Cancer Center calls Pocatello, Idaho, home. It overlooks the sprawling valley of the Portneuf River that leads to a beautiful reservoir. Surrounding mountains create panoramic views in every direction. The cancer center, which opened in 2004, is located in its own single-story building on the campus of Portneuf Medical Center and operates as a hospital outpatient department. The cancer center treats patients from southeastern Idaho and cares for a diverse rural population.

Under One Roof

Patients at Portneuf Cancer Center do not have to travel to separate locations for care—medical oncology, radiation oncology, dietitians, and a social worker all provide care under the same roof. “The beautiful thing about this is that when patients walk into the cancer center, our staff knows their name and the patients become part of the fabric of our center,” explains Mary Keating, director of marketing.

Housed within the cancer center is an infusion suite, clinic, and radiation suite all on one floor with patient flow in mind. The infusion suite, located at the north end of the cancer center, includes 10 infusion chairs that look out onto the Portneuf Valley through floor-to-ceiling windows and 2 private infusion rooms with a hospital bed and private bedroom. The infusion suite is staffed by 6 nurses—4 full-time, 1 part-time, and 1 as needed (PRN). Three of the nursing staff hold oncology-certified nursing credentials and two others have Vascular Access Board certification. The outpatient

clinic is the “hub” of the cancer center and is adjacent to the radiation oncology suite. It features 10 exam rooms and a laboratory draw station.

Radiation oncology services are located opposite to the outpatient clinic and infusion suite. The cancer center boasts an Elekta Infinity™ linear accelerator, cone beam computed tomography scanner, and large bore computed tomography scanner. Patients can receive a range of treatments, including 3D conformal, intensity-modulated radiation therapy, volumetric-modulated arc therapy, image-guided radiation therapy, stereotactic body radiation therapy, and stereotactic radiosurgery. The radiation oncology suite is staffed by three radiation therapists, one medical dosimetrist, and one medical physicist.

In addition to the infusion suite nurses and radiation suite, the Portneuf Cancer Center is staffed by two medical oncologists, two radiation oncologists, three certified physician assistants, one oncology nurse navigator, one licensed social worker, three financial counselors, one registered dietitian, and two certified tumor registrars. All of the center’s medical oncology providers and staff are hospital employed; radiation oncologists are contracted.

Most patients are referred to the cancer center by Portneuf Medical Center’s surgeons or primary care physicians, which streamlines the referral process. The cancer center also sees patients referred from outside of the Pocatello area.

The leading cancer sites treated at Portneuf Cancer Center include breast, lung, colorectal, and prostate. Patients with breast cancer may be seen at the cancer center’s

multidisciplinary breast clinic, which allows patients to meet with their medical oncologist, radiation oncologist, and surgeon all in one visit. The nurse navigator is key to this coordinated planning and responsible for ensuring that any extra testing is scheduled and completed before the clinic visit. Individuals with colon or rectal cancer follow a similar patient flow, and the aim with all other patients is to meet the cancer center’s goal of scheduling a consultation within three to five days of the initial referral.

The cancer center takes pride in its multidisciplinary approach to cancer care and the variety of supportive services it provides patients. (Patients can take advantage of these services at any point during their treatment journey.) All patients meet with the program’s social worker and full-time dietitian at the start of their treatment. The dietitian establishes a good nutritional base for patients, who may schedule follow-up visits, if necessary. Patients can also self-refer to meet with the social worker and financial counselors. Portneuf Cancer Center has received the American Society of Clinical Oncology’s Quality Oncology Practice Initiative certification.

Outreach Clinics

Like other healthcare providers serving a large rural area, Portneuf Cancer Center’s delivery of patient-centered care can be affected by its patients’ geographic location, ability to travel, and weather conditions. In response to the needs of patients living in rural settings and to reduce the travel burden for these patients and their families, Portneuf Cancer Center has opened four satellite

cancer clinics. Farthest from main clinic in Pocatello is the clinic at Steele Memorial Hospital in Salmon, Idaho (about 210 miles away); the closest satellite clinic is located at Caribou Memorial Hospital in Soda Springs, Idaho (about 56 miles away). These clinics are staffed daily with licensed practice nurses, a certified medical assistant, and a physician assistant. A medical oncologist from Portneuf Cancer Center visits the clinics once a month, spending two days each in Soda Springs and Salmon and a full or half-day at the remaining two satellite sites. Depending on the clinic location, oncologists will see between 6 to 20 patients face-to-face. Chemotherapy, which is overseen by a medical oncologist, is available at each clinic.

Should a patient need to be seen by the oncologist other than during a scheduled visit, the physician assistant or certified medical assistant at the clinic uses telehealth so that patients can be seen by their oncology provider. The Portneuf Cancer Center oncologists see about 15 to 20 patients a month via telehealth appointments. The cancer center has seen tremendous growth in its patient population with the implementation of these outreach clinics because they enable patients to stay in their hometowns with their families. If patients need radiation or combination therapy, they are treated at the cancer center in Pocatello. Patients who must travel to the main facility can take advantage of the resources available at the Portneuf Medical Center to help them with the financial burden of treatment and travel.

Transportation and Lodging Support

Portneuf Medical Center has a guest house and RV park on its campus to accommodate visiting patients, their families, and visitors who travel long distances or who may experience weather disruptions that could impact treatment schedules. The RV park has six paved, full hookup sites available at no cost, situated by picnic tables and majestic mountain views. Cancer center patients are given priority and can reserve a spot through their nurse navigator or social worker. The guest house is located just two miles away from the main hospital, can house two families, and is also free of charge. The

hospital runs a free shuttle for travel to the cancer center from either the guest house or RV park; valet service is available for those who drive.

Access to Cutting-Edge Treatment and Clinical Trials

For patients who need treatment beyond Portneuf Cancer Center's capacity or access to clinical trials, the cancer center facilitates referrals to the Huntsman Cancer Institute in Salt Lake City, Utah. Portneuf Cancer Center has established a streamlined referral process with the institute and coordination is prioritized by both programs. This referral pathway creates greater opportunities for Portneuf Cancer Center's rural patient population, especially those with more complex or rare diseases, to access specialist care and clinical trials.

Patient-Centered Care

Portneuf Cancer Center sees a variety of patients and prioritizes their care in many ways. Because it is located next the Fort Hall Reservation, its staff works closely with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. A social worker/navigator helps Fort Hall Reservation patients navigate and coordinate care with Portneuf Cancer Center. About 10 to 20 percent of the cancer center's patient population travels from Fort Hall.


There are cultural considerations in treating this specific patient population, and the center's staff takes pride in its ability to effectively coordinate and care for these patients. To further accommodate its diverse patients, staff members—a medical oncologist and social worker—speak fluent Spanish or can help translate for its Spanish-speaking patients, helping to eliminate cultural and language barriers to care.

To further its patient-centered focus, Portneuf Cancer Center holds three tumor boards—a general tumor board, a breast-specific tumor board, and a thoracic tumor board—each scheduled once a month. The tumor board brings together Portneuf Medical Center's urologists, surgeons, radiologists, interventional radiologist, pathologists, nursing staff, navigators, medical oncology, radiation oncology, and support staff. Its three breast surgeons attend the breast tumor board, while the



thoracic tumor board is attended by cardiologists, pulmonologists, and cardiothoracic surgeons.

Because the Portneuf Medical Center and the cancer center's staff are a close, tight-knit group, they are in conversation with one another frequently to discuss patients' treatment. "They do not hesitate to pick up the phone to call whichever discipline they need to talk to regarding the patient," explains Jenni Adams, RN, BSN, OCN, cancer center director. Therefore, tumor boards are not the only place in which multidisciplinary cancer care is prioritized, because collaboration among clinicians and staff takes place every day.

Portneuf Cancer Center is proud to have its clinicians and staff working side by side every day. In fact, this close, collaborative environment may be an advantage of caring for patients in its rural setting—the cancer center has not experienced high turnover rates among its nurses, therapists, and/or providers. "This is a big advantage to patient-centered care," explains Robb Dye, MSW, licensed clinical social worker. "It is all behind the scenes." This approach has helped establish crucial relationships among its staff and clinicians that patients experience and benefit from firsthand. These care providers know their patients' names and stories, and patients are greeted by the same smiling face at every cancer center visit. 

Select supportive care services include:

- Nutrition services
- Financial counseling services
- Psychosocial services
- Support groups

Approximate number of new analytic cases seen in 2019: 400