

# spotlight

## Tennessee Oncology, Tennessee



**T**ennessee Oncology is a physician-led private oncology practice based in Nashville. A partner of OneOncology, Tennessee Oncology operates 32 clinic locations across the state and one in northern Georgia and offers medical and radiation oncology, imaging, and lab services. Its seven imaging centers are accredited by the American College of Radiology, and the entire practice is certified by the Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI®). Additionally, Tennessee Oncology was selected to be 1 of 12 participating practices in the American Society of Clinical Oncology's (ASCO's) Oncology Medical Home certification pilot. This new ASCO certification combines its QOPI qualifications with an additional six care delivery standards and is designed to further promote coordinated, accessible, and evidence-based care delivery, including measurements to facilitate continuous quality improvement.<sup>1</sup>

Through OneOncology, Tennessee Oncology's providers are uniquely connected with their colleagues and experts, who can assist in informing and developing treatment plans. "The OneOncology network allows us to closely interact with community oncology practices around the different parts of the United States," says Susan Frailley, chief administrative officer of Front Office Operations at Tennessee Oncology. "The knowledge base and resources provided through the network really help us a lot with the challenges we're facing and how we can navigate around those." Providers can participate in and chair

OneOncology's committees, furthering their career development and the practice's work in quality improvement.

Tennessee Oncology hires and employs all clinical and non-clinical staff, who are then paid through the practice's partnership with OneOncology. Though staff may receive their checks from OneOncology, all work for Tennessee Oncology and deliver on its mission to provide access to high-quality cancer care for all patients within their community and close to their home.

### **An Adapting Model of Care**

In widely covering the middle east area of the state, Tennessee Oncology faces a major challenge: location. While many patients live in more populated areas like Nashville and Chattanooga, others live in smaller, rural communities. Therefore, Tennessee Oncology leadership knew they needed to stand up clinics of various sizes in different locations, while optimizing practice resources and staff time. "Our challenge is: how do we bring care to the community and to the patient?" says Kathy McGee, chief clinic operations officer at Tennessee Oncology. "We want to provide care to the patient in the community where they live, so we have to think strategically about how we open clinics in those areas."

To serve patients in rural locations, Tennessee Oncology staff established adaptable clinic structures for their full-time and part-time locations. Its largest clinic sees about 4,000 patients a month, while its smallest clinic sees about 100 patients a month. And three clinics—in Smithville, Lawrenceburg, and Spring Hill, Tenn.—are

open one day a week, with staff traveling from other nearby locations to provide care to patients locally. With this flexibility, the practice ensures that traveling to appointments and navigating the healthcare system will not be a patient burden.

### **Multidisciplinary Cancer Care**

Similarly, medical oncology and hematology services are available at Tennessee Oncology's clinics through various staffing models. At least 1 medical oncologist (up to 12 total), as well as medical assistants, lab staff, and nursing staff (ranging from 2 to 17), are on-site in each clinic every day. The practice employs APPs who assist oncologists with patient visits, orders, and more. Tennessee Oncology also employs patient service representatives at each of its clinics, who are tasked with greeting, checking-in and checking-out patients, and handling all medical records.

Additionally, the practice's infusion suites range in size, from 6 chairs to 37 chairs, totaling 550 chairs across all clinic locations. Pharmacy technicians mix patients' treatments on-site, and nurses are available to assist with infusions and injections when needed. Tennessee Oncology employs a central pharmacy—accredited by the Utilization Review Accreditation Commission and Accreditation Commission for Health Care—located in downtown Nashville that dispenses patients' oral prescriptions via mail-order or on-site pickup. This pharmacy is staffed by pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and nurses, who support patients by filling their prescriptions and following them through treatment to

ensure therapy adherence and to provide education.

For patients requiring surgical services, all gynecologic and surgical oncology services are provided in partnership with oncologists and surgeons in the community. Radiation oncology treatments, including IMRT, IGRT, SRS, LDR, HDR brachytherapy, total body irradiation, and proton therapy, are offered at 16 of the practice's clinics. Each radiation oncology location is run in partnership with a local hospital that provides the support staff to run day-to-day operations and at least one radiation oncologist is on-site every day.

Tennessee Oncology developed a unique solution to support staffing and patient care needs across the practice: a float team of 20 to 30 professionals who can backfill clinic staff when necessary. Further, operator, triage, and new patient teams are centralized in Nashville, overseeing a territory of four to six clinics each.

Staff are proud to offer a variety of supportive care services like psychology, genetic counseling, integrative oncology, nutrition, care coordination, patient advocacy to assist with food and transportation needs, and financial counseling. Oncologists work closely with their patients to identify needs and make referrals to palliative care, integrative oncology, labs, etc. These supportive care services are offered in-person at Tennessee Oncology's larger locations and virtually through telehealth, so patients who cannot travel can access much-needed support in the comfort of their home. While any physician-provided services are billable, many others are free to patients.


### **Serving the Communities' Needs**

Tennessee Oncology sees a high incidence of lung cancer, as well as patients presenting with a secondary disease and comorbidities (e.g., diabetes, obesity). To address these needs, the practice partners with local hospitals and agencies to assist patients, especially when care is needed outside the practice's business hours. Tennessee Oncology can facilitate care with local partners when a need is identified, and some of these partners will provide services within patients' homes. Additionally, the



practice has implemented a lung cancer screening program that allows all Tennessee Oncology providers to refer appropriate patients for screening. This service is also offered to partnering pulmonologists in the community.

In prioritizing community partnerships to truly offer comprehensive cancer care, Tennessee Oncology partners with Sarah Cannon Research to host Phase II and Phase III clinical trials. These studies are available to qualifying patients regardless of which clinic they are receiving treatment, and research nurses work side-by-side with clinic staff to ensure patients are enrolled in an available study. In 2021, Tennessee Oncology enrolled 42 patients in its Phase I drug development unit and currently has about 1,700 patients on a clinical trial.

In opening clinic locations across the state (with one additional clinic in Georgia), Tennessee Oncology staff take pride in their ability to deliver comprehensive oncology care to patients close to their home. "We're all very proud of how everyone comes together to take care of the patient," says Leah Owens, BSN, RN, BMTCN, OCN, executive director of Care Transformation at Tennessee Oncology. "Even though we are 30 plus locations, it still very much feels like it is just one big team providing care." 

### **Reference**

1. Woofter K, Kennedy EB, Adelson K, et al. Oncology medical home standards. Published July 13, 2021. Accessed June 6, 2022. [asco.org/practice-patients/cancer-care-standards/oncology-medical-home-standards](https://www.asco.org/practice-patients/cancer-care-standards/oncology-medical-home-standards)