

# spotlight

## Maroone Cancer Center Cleveland Clinic Weston, Florida



Since its inception in 1921 as a not-for-profit multispecialty group practice, Cleveland Clinic has been at the forefront of modern medicine. Founded by George Crile Sr, MD; Frank Bunts, MD; William Lower, MD; and John Phillips, MD, the institution was established with a mission to provide exceptional patient care, conduct groundbreaking research, and educate future generations of medical professionals. The inaugural dedication of its offices on February 26, 1921, featured a keynote address by renowned physician William Mayo, MD, setting the stage for a legacy of innovation and excellence.

Over the past century, Cleveland Clinic has evolved from a small outpatient clinic into an integrated international health system. With more than 65,000 providers spread across over 200 locations worldwide, the institution now serves nearly 6 million patients annually. Among its notable expansions is the establishment of the Maroone Cancer Center in Weston, Florida, in 2015, which has emerged as a

comprehensive cancer center under the leadership of its director, Zeina A. Nahleh, MD.

Dr. Nahleh, a breast oncologist and chair of the Department of Hematology-Oncology at the Maroone Cancer Center, brings a deeply personal understanding of patient care to her role. Born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon, amidst civil unrest, she recognized early on the importance of empathy and sensitivity in delivering cancer care. This patient-centered ethos lies at the heart of the cancer center's mission, where every individual's well-being is prioritized above all else in the delivering of hematology, medical, radiation, and surgical oncology services.

### Delivering Patient-Centered Care

"We pride ourselves on providing the best experience because we constantly focus on a patient-centered approach," Dr. Nahleh said. "We have a great culture here at Cleveland Clinic, Maroone Cancer Center, because we have built a team of professionals who do care and

who are passionate, and that is something you don't find everywhere."

The Maroone Cancer Center's designation as a Center of Excellence by the Florida Department of Health in 2022 underscores its commitment to delivering exemplary cancer care. According to Dr. Nahleh, the designation was created in 2013 by the Florida Legislature and recognizes hospitals and treatment centers that demonstrate excellence in delivering comprehensive, patient-centered care for patients receiving anticancer treatment in Florida.

"We are 1 of 6 programs with this designation," she said. The center also boasts accreditations from the American College of Surgeons (ACS) Commission on Cancer, the American College of Radiation Oncology, and the College of American Pathologists. "We have also been accredited by the National [Accreditation] Program for Breast Cancer[s], and the National [Accreditation] Program for Rectal Cancer," (both administered by ACS) Dr. Nahleh said. She





believes that these accreditations exemplify the cancer center's unwavering commitment to upholding the highest standards of care, as does their patient intake process and practice layout.

"Patients come to us through many channels and the main one is the call center," Dr. Nahleh explained. "We focus on 2 main goals when it comes to patient access. First, we like to book an appointment for all the new patients with cancer within 7 days. The other [initiative] is called *appointment when wanted*. For all patients with cancer, we try to closely fit their preferred time and date." Dr. Nahleh believes urgency is key in delivering comprehensive cancer care, to ensure patients maintain a positive outlook on treatment. "We make sure we [providers] are accessible, because patients with cancer are very anxious, and they want to make sure they get in as soon as they are diagnosed," she said. "If you delay treatment, the outcome is not the same."

### Delivery Care That Is Convenient

Through the doors of the Maroon Cancer Center, patients will find a layout built to maximize their convenience. The radiation oncology department is located on the first floor and offers a wide range of treatments, such as advanced and precise stereotactic radiotherapy, using state-of-the-art technology that boasts submillimeter precision and real-time tumor monitoring. In addition, the

department offers image-guided radiotherapy services, a specialized CT simulator, 4D treatment planning, and high-dose-rate radiotherapy. The second floor houses support services, administrative, and research, while the infusion clinic is on the third level.

"Our infusion clinic has a dedicated pharmacy and 36 infusion chairs. There are currently plans to add 10 more," Dr. Nahleh said. "It is important that patients don't have to go to different buildings or places to get the care they need."

The cancer center is organized based on specialty, as they have 10 disease-specific cancer teams. According to Dr. Nahleh, each team is staffed with an expert in their field as Maroon Cancer Center's 200-person physician and nonphysician staff—all of whom are employed by the cancer center—work in multidisciplinary teams. This includes providing patients with tailored support services as they navigate the cancer care continuum.

"We have established several support services that are geared toward improving the mental and physical health of the patient," Dr. Nahleh said. "Our navigators are subspecialized; [care] is not just one-size-fits-all."

### Support Services and Clinical Research

The cancer center provides patients access to social workers, genetic counseling, a wig boutique, a patient education center, a book

club, art and music therapy, massage therapy, and an in-house psychologist. All services are available in person or virtually, and Dr. Nahleh believes they provide patients with an environment of healing.

In addition to an expansive array of psychosocial care options, the Maroon Cancer Center remains at the forefront of cancer research, with over 35 active clinical trials spanning various diseases. "We started a vaccine trial for head and neck cancer, which is amazing because patients are responding positively," Dr. Nahleh said. "We also engage in quality-of-life outcome[s] research." All patients are screened for available clinical trials by a research team that shares their findings during weekly subspecialty tumor boards.

According to Dr. Nahleh, meeting the standard of care that Maroon Cancer Center prides itself on has not been devoid of challenges. However, she credits the resiliency of its staff with ensuring that patients receive the best care possible. "We strive for excellence in quality care but also [in our] service," she said. "Despite many challenges, we have stayed focused on our mission of providing the best patient experience. We are a resilient program, always growing and innovating, steadfast in our mission to provide the best experience for every patient we serve." 