

# spotlight

## Peoples Cancer Institute Dalton, Georgia



**P**eoples Cancer Institute in Dalton, Ga., opened its doors on Jan. 6, 2020. The 46,000 square foot comprehensive facility sits three stories high on the campus of Hamilton Medical Center, the flagship affiliate of Hamilton Health Care System. Hamilton Medical Center is a not-for-profit hospital that serves Dalton and the surrounding communities in northwest Georgia. Accredited by the Commission on Cancer, the institute centralizes patient-centered care and outpatient cancer services in one convenient location.

### By Design

Prior to the opening of Peoples Cancer Institute, Hamilton’s cancer care components—diagnostics, clinics, infusion,

and radiation—were located throughout its campus. The goal of integrating all outpatient cancer care services under one roof was the driving force behind the expansion of the oncology program into its newly constructed building. The process was conducted with the needs of the patient, community, and staff in mind. With the opening of the new facility, patients with cancer no longer need to navigate multiple sites in and around the campus to access care.

In early 2015, Hamilton Medical Center’s medical and administrative team came together to analyze the demographics of its catchment area, services provided, and the space limitations it was facing. As the planning process for the new cancer institute began, Hamilton Medical Center’s leadership

and staff engaged its community to provide feedback throughout every step of its design. For example, the initial design did not include a physical connection to the main hospital. After focus groups expressed concerns, Hamilton Medical Center’s leadership worked with the city council to close a public road and facilitate the construction of a walkway physically connecting the new cancer institute to the main hospital, streamlining patient and staff access.

“This connector is a physical representation of the partnership between our community and Hamilton Medical Center,” shares Jane Snipes, executive director, Whitfield Healthcare Foundation, which provides fundraising support to Hamilton Health Care System.

Community feedback is also reflected in the interior design of the new facility. Hamilton Medical Center listened to patients and caregivers, including those who received cancer care elsewhere.

“We heard patients loud and clear,” says Ernie Elemento, vice president, Hamilton Health Care System. “They did not want to sit in a chair for hours receiving chemotherapy while staring at a wall.” Today, patients receiving treatment in one of the 20 semi-private infusion recliners have expansive views of Dalton through floor-to-ceiling windows that provide abundant natural light. Six additional chairs are private, allowing patients privacy if they prefer.

### Our Floor Plan

Peoples Cancer Institute is staffed by three medical oncologists, two radiation oncologists, one radiologist, and one nurse



practitioner. In addition, Peeples Cancer Institute employs pharmacists, clinic nurses, infusion nurses, nurse navigators, radiation therapists, mammogram technologists, social workers, researchers, tumor registrars, and many other vital staff members.

Radiation oncology services are located on the first floor. Equipped with a state-of-the-art Varian™ Truebeam™ Linac and 4D computed tomography simulator, the cancer institute offers a variety of radiation therapy treatment modalities, including intensity-modulated radiation therapy, stereotactic radiosurgery, stereotactic body radiation therapy, and 3D and high-dose rate brachytherapy.

The second floor houses the main reception area, a contemporary waiting area including a bistro, the medical oncology clinic space, and a lab draw station. Also located on this floor is Women's Imaging, offering the latest in 3D mammography, stereotactic biopsy, and ultrasound.

The cancer institute's 26-chair ambulatory infusion center and dedicated infusion pharmacy occupy the third floor. The pharmacy is centrally located within the infusion space, facilitating communication and collaboration between pharmacy and nursing staff. This pharmacy exclusively supports the ambulatory infusion suite, where all outpatient infusions are performed. Though the pharmacy does not currently provide oral oncolytics, the cancer institute is working toward opening an accredited specialty pharmacy within its current retail pharmacy space.

With oncology services together on three floors, "all physicians now have space in this new facility to collaborate on patient care," explains Snipes.

### The Patient Experience

When guests enter Peeples Cancer Institute, they are welcomed by a friendly greeter who is equipped to answer questions and escort them where needed. Many who visit the institute choose to enjoy a coffee, smoothie, or snack from the in-house bistro located in the spacious lobby specifically designed to provide a calm, relaxing atmosphere.

"First impressions are important, and our intent is to clearly convey a feeling of confidence, tranquility, and healing. Our main lobby has more similarities with a

high-end hotel than it does a cancer center," describes Elemento.

"Every aspect of Peeples Cancer Institute is focused on the needs of our patients and families so that we provide an outstanding patient experience and the best clinical outcomes," says Jeff Myers, president and CEO of Hamilton Health Care System. "Our goal is to foster collaboration, communication, and education among physicians and our medical teams to advance and enhance our care for patients. They are our number one priority."

Patients are referred to the institute from various physician groups throughout the region. Radiation therapy patients are scheduled for simulations, with treatment beginning a week later. Patients prescribed chemotherapy follow the prior authorization process and are scheduled for treatment. Because the institute opened in early 2020, these processes are continuously evolving to meet the specific needs of patients with various disease sites and stages.

With Hamilton Medical Center connected directly to the institute, its general surgeon can biopsy patients with suspicious lumps right away. This allows for staff to move patients quickly through the navigation process so that there is no gap between diagnosis and treatment.

To provide patients access to the latest research and medications, a research coordinator is training to help provide information and access to clinical trials.

A social worker meets with all new patients so that they can have a primary contact and access to her services throughout their treatment journey. The social worker is also available to help patients find transportation and financial assistance.

The institute is seeking to hire a nutritionist to provide nutrition services.

All supportive care services at Peeples Cancer Institute are free to patients.

### Looking Ahead

Peeples Cancer Institute will soon offer genetic screening and genetic counseling services. Patients identified as high risk are given immediate access to a certified genetic counselor through tele-genetics. The new facility is completely wired and ready for



telehealth, and the tele-genetics program is the first step in utilizing these new features.

Peeples Cancer Institute is also planning to expand its menu of supportive care programs. A donor's gift is making it possible for the institute to begin planning an immersive arts and healing program that will bring music and art to its patients and caregivers. This artwork will complement existing pieces from local and regional artists, which currently adorn the institute's walls.

A therapy dog visits the infusion center weekly, and the cancer institute is looking to start a pet therapy program that will allow therapy dogs to visit with patients throughout the facility.

Growing its supportive care services allows the institute's staff to support patients "emotionally, mentally, and physically throughout their cancer treatment journey," explains Rita Harris, service line administrator, Peeples Cancer Institute.

Through community engagement, personalized interactions, and patient-focused design, Peeples Cancer Institute provides patients and families the highest quality care close to home. 