



From left: Mark Burshteyn, MD; Sasan Roayaie, MD; and Jonathan Schwartz, MD

A Dream Team Leads the Fight Against Liver Disease

Liver disease is increasing at an alarming rate. A new multidisciplinary hepatobiliary program at White Plains Hospital is answering the need for advanced liver care. BY DAVID LEVINE

The largest internal organ in the body, the liver helps digest food, store energy, and remove toxins. But as a result of two trends in the general population—aging and obesity—liver disease is increasing at an alarming rate.

A type of liver disease called nonalcoholic fatty liver disease is the fastest growing cause of liver transplants in younger Americans, according to a recent report in the *Journal of Clinical Gastroenterology*. The disease has until recently been limited to older adults, but it is also linked to childhood obesity, which causes hypertension and diabetes, pushing more and younger adults into end-stage liver disease.

Another cause of liver disease, hepatitis C, is also wreaking havoc in the United States. A recent report from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality states that the rate of hospital stays due to hepatitis C increased 67 percent between 2005 and 2014 in adults ages 52 to 72 years. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control says that baby boomers are five times more likely to have hepatitis C—which can lead to liver damage, cirrhosis, and even liver cancer—than other adults. In fact, 75 percent of all people with hep C were born between 1945 and 1965, the CDC reports.

White Plains Hospital recently assembled a liver-disease dream team to enhance its multidisciplinary hepatobiliary program. The team consists of Dr. Sasan Roayaie, Dr. Jonathan M. Schwartz, and Dr. Mark Burshteyn. Dr. Roayaie—who has extensive experience in the treatment of primary liver cancers—brings unique surgical skills to provide individualized care for patients needing complex liver, bile duct, and pancreas surgery. With Dr. Schwartz, the Hospital gains a board-certified hepatologist trained in treating patients with acute and chronic liver diseases, including those who require liver transplantation. He splits his time between White Plains and Montefiore, which benefits those patients who may need a liver transplant because of the collaboration with their well-established and highly-regarded transplant team under the leadership of Montefiore's Milan Kinkhabwala, MD, Chief of Transplant Surgery.

Rounding out the group is Dr. Burshteyn, who joined the Hospital as director of interventional oncology, a subspecialty of interventional radiology that uses image guidance and minimally invasive procedures to treat and cure many types of cancer by shrinking and destroying tumors.

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Many patients have such severe disease that they can't tolerate traditional surgery, Dr. Roayaie adds. They need minimally invasive procedures done by an interventional oncologist (IO) such as Dr. Burshteyn. IO is the fastest growing area in interventional radiology and has been recognized as an important pillar of oncologic care, along with radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and surgery.

"Interventional treatments are focused and targeted, resulting in greater doses of medication delivered directly to the tumor, while sparing healthy tissues," Dr. Burshteyn says. This typically benefits patients in the form of minimal incisions, shorter hospital stays, faster recovery times, and reduced complications.

There are two main categories of IO procedures. One involves inserting small beads containing chemotherapy or radiation into the small arteries that feed a tumor. The other, known as ablation, involves applying heat or cold to kill tumor cells. "These are used both for primary tumors that start in the liver and metastatic cancers that start somewhere else in the body," Dr. Burshteyn explains.

Dr. Schwartz, the third member of the treatment team, has two decades of experience managing patients with advanced liver disease and cancer, "especially in the context of transplantation," he says.

Dr. Schwartz will continue to be part of the Montefiore liver transplant program and act as a liaison between the hospitals. Along with managing transplant patients, Dr. Schwartz will treat all other forms of liver disease, including that caused by hepatitis C, as well as other viral infections of the liver, and fatty liver disease.

"The hospital made a commitment to provide very high-level care to patients with liver tumors and liver disease, and I was lucky enough to be asked to join this group," Dr. Schwartz says. "I've known Sasan [Roayaie] for many years as a leader in the field of liver cancer care."

Dr. Roayaie says Dr. Schwartz is a nationally known transplant expert, and his addition "makes for a good collaboration with Montefiore and a seamless transition for transplant patients." And Dr. Burshteyn comes from Philadelphia's Fox Chase Cancer Center with a stellar reputation as well, he says.

"There are a lot of exciting things happening at White Plains Hospital," Dr. Burshteyn notes. "There has been big investment from the Hospital leadership to bring on experts in cancer care. It's a very exciting proposition, a new chapter of advanced cancer care in Westchester." •

