

Cancer Initiatives and Activities in 2016

The Cancer Committee has been very busy throughout 2016, as we prepare for survey for our accreditation by the American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer (the CoC) in early 2017. We are very excited to join, through the accreditation process, an elite group of cancer centers throughout the country.

Through the many successful initiatives of the Cancer Committee this year, Ephraim McDowell Health has very meaningfully enhanced the delivery of cancer care to the communities we serve. Important progress has been made in several areas of note:

Clinical Trials: Until very recently, patient participation in clinical trials has required patient referral to academic centers. The Ephraim McDowell Commonwealth Cancer Center (EMCCC) has made great strides this year in establishing a cancer clinical trials program for patient participation close to home. Presently, selected patients with metastatic breast cancer or prostate cancer can participate in two clinical trials involving the administration of a very promising new drug (niraparib) available regionally only at EMCCC. Patients with bone marrow disorders can participate in one of three clinical studies, including a registry of bone marrow pathology and longitudinal observational studies of polycythemia vera and essential thrombocythemia, two disorders of excess blood cell production. Very soon EMCCC will be participating in a study of a new drug, available locally only at EMCCC, for the treatment of multiple myeloma. This year to date, EMCCC has enrolled nearly 50 patients in these trials, and the coming year will witness continued expansion of available studies for our patients – EMCCC is actively seeking participation in additional breast, lung and colorectal cancer trials.

Genetic Screening for Cancer Risk: Some individuals have a genetic predisposition for certain cancers – especially for breast, colon, prostate, ovarian and pancreatic cancers. The Cancer Committee established a clinical goal for 2016 to assess the need for genetic screening for all patients newly diagnosed with one of these cancers. As an example, through October of this year, all new breast cancer patients seen at the EMCCC office were assessed for the need to test for an inherited gene mutation. Of 23 patients subsequently tested for the mutation, six were found positive and were referred for genetic counseling. For colorectal cancers resected at our hospital through October, all were assessed for an inherited genetic abnormality. One was identified and referred for genetic counseling. The Cancer Committee anticipates continuing this effort at all sites served by EMH, including offices outside the EMCCC site.

Psychosocial Distress Screening: We all know that being told of a new cancer diagnosis is a very stressful event. The Cancer Committee has endeavored to effectively address this by screening all newly diagnosed cancer patients for their degree of stress, and identifying particular areas of stress, ranging from financial concerns to family support and transportation for care. To date this year, 100% of all patients with new cancer diagnoses seen at EMCCC were screened for psychosocial stress, and referrals to support services and other assistance were generated accordingly. This initiative has been expanded to include all newly diagnosed patients not seen at EMCCC. Responses from patients have been overwhelmingly positive.

Community Outreach: Engagement of our community at large has been a priority for the Cancer Committee. Three cancer screening events – two at EMCCC and one at the Signature Health nursing care facility – were conducted in 2016. These events included educational materials on cancer risk, melanoma screening exams, and distribution of kits for detection of fecal occult blood (a warning sign for colorectal cancer). The Cancer Committee has also spearheaded our community smoking cessation program; the next session will begin on January 17, 2017.

The EMH Breast Health Program: Another program goal of the Cancer Committee this year was the establishment of a formal breast health program. As a result, in early 2017 the new Ephraim McDowell Breast Health Center, occupying the entire second floor of the Ephraim McDowell Diagnostic Center on Daniel Drive, will open. This beautiful facility will facilitate obtaining mammographic and ultrasound breast imaging in a comfortable, private setting, with results to be communicated to patients very rapidly – frequently on the day of the study. In addition, the Cancer Committee’s breast center program will include, beginning in January 2017, twice monthly breast cancer conferences. At these conferences, every new breast cancer diagnosed at EMH facilities will be discussed by a multi-disciplinary team including physicians from the departments of surgery, radiation oncology, medical oncology, and pathology. Thus, each patient with a new breast cancer will have their case discussed in detail within a few days after the diagnosis is made, with formal discussion results to be presented to the patient and her referring physician.

Quality Improvement Measures: The Cancer Committee instituted two Quality Improvement initiatives in 2016. The first improvement program – the minimization of wait times from clinic arrival to initiation of intravenous cancer treatment at EMCCC – successfully accomplished its objectives. Steady improvement was realized, and by September only 8.5% of patients waited more than 60 minutes, only 4% waited more than 80 minutes, and 0.2% waited more than 120 minutes. The second initiative – establishing patient adherence to oral chemotherapy treatment plans at home – was an important objective in view of the ever-increasing number of cancer treatments now available in oral form. A formal process of patient education was established, and all patients demonstrated excellent compliance through meticulous nursing follow-up.

These accomplishments represent just some of the progress the Cancer Committee is proud to report for this year. We are very excited to continue the rapid growth of the cancer program at EMH. If you have any questions about EMH cancer care, please contact us at (859) 236-2203.