

Report of Community Outreach Outcomes for 2015

This year the Cancer Program at Ephraim McDowell Commonwealth Cancer Center (EMCCC) and Ephraim McDowell Regional Medical Center (EMRMC) has been working hard to accomplish accreditation as a Community Cancer Center by the Commission on Cancer, administered by the American College of Surgeons in alliance with the American Cancer Society. This has been an exciting process that has already achieved significant progress in advancing cancer care in our communities.

The Program began the year by examining the results of an extensive community needs survey administered by EMRMC and Professional Research Consultants, Inc. Several findings from this survey related to cancer caught our attention. Indeed, Kentucky has a serious problem with cancer. Even more troublesome, our region of Kentucky has a bigger problem with cancer than the state as a whole.

For example, overall cancer mortality rates show that Kentucky is among the worst states, with 205 cancer deaths per 100,000 population, compared to 174 deaths per 100,000 in the USA as a whole. Our region is even worse than the state with 217 cancer deaths per 100,000 population, and within our region Casey County is much worse at 283 deaths per 100,000 population. We also found that mortality rates for the four most common cancers (lung, breast, prostate and colorectal cancers) are all significantly worse for Kentucky than the USA as a whole, and our region shows higher mortality rates for each of those cancers than the mortality rates for Kentucky as a whole.

Clearly, we have much work to do to improve these outcomes. Methods to improve cancer statistics in our communities include early detection through appropriate cancer screening, and efforts at cancer prevention with, for example, smoking cessation programs. The community needs survey found that our area is obtaining mammography for breast cancer screening at about the same rate of the rest of the state, but that patients in our region obtain colonoscopy screening for colon cancer at a rate considerably lower than the rest of Kentucky.

Accordingly, among its many program goals for 2015, the Cancer Program resolved to establish regular cancer screening events, focusing on colon cancer but including screening for skin cancers and initiating evaluation for possible inherited malignancies. We conducted two cancer screening fairs, in April and October of 2015, initiating an endeavor that will be continued on a regular basis at EMCCC to facilitate early detection of cancer in our communities. Through the screening processes of testing of fecal occult blood (colorectal or GI cancer) and skin screening exams (melanoma) two screening fair attendees have already been referred for further evaluation, with colonoscopy and with dermatology consultation. We look forward to increasing community awareness of our semi-annual screening fairs so that more of our community members will take advantage of this service in 2016 and beyond.

Another finding of the community needs survey pointed to our persistent problem with tobacco use in our area. About 24% of local adults still smoke – much higher than the national smoking prevalence of 15% – even though 70% of those patients were advised to quit by their health care providers. As a result, the Cancer Program has initiated, in conjunction with the Boyle County

Health Department, a smoking cessation program that has already enrolled 30 participants. The Cancer Program is providing nicotine patches free of charge for the program, which will continue through 2016 and which we hope will be an ongoing program at EMCCC and EMRMC.

Our greatest asset in the effort to improve our cancer statistics is an informed public. The Cancer Program has embarked on several initiatives to improve cancer awareness in our communities. Cancer Program representatives have presented information at the recent Teens Against Tobacco Use this past spring, and we intend to collaborate with them routinely moving forward. In May 2015 our Cancer Program representative Cheryl Bolling discussed testicular and breast cancer signs, symptoms and detection with seniors at Lincoln County High School; and in October 2015 Cheryl met with students in the fourth through twelfth grades at Burgin Schools to discuss tobacco use and lung cancer. The Cancer Program in collaboration with 21st Century Radiation Oncology continues to run our monthly cancer support group at EMCCC (now running for five years and counting!), with an average of about 20 attendees per month.

The Cancer Program has embarked on numerous additional Quality Improvement initiatives, all of which are designed to optimize the delivery of cancer care to all of the residents of our surrounding communities. If you have any questions about the Cancer Screening Fairs, the Smoking Cessation Program, the Support Group, the educational programs or any other aspects of cancer care, please contact us at (859) 236-2203.