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Compassion, Connection and Core Values

BY NATALIA HURT

From the heart of Oregon's wine country, the H.R. Hoover, MD, Cancer Center (HRHCC) brings innovative technologies and treatments to the Willamette Valley. While these breakthroughs play a critical role in treating cancer, HRHCC knows they are only part of the equation. Based on the team's experience, the best possible patient outcomes require something more: human connection, community and a medical culture built on shared core values.

Until 2002, residents of the region were forced to travel hours from home for cancer care. Due to the time and resources required, this distance became a barrier to treatment and an emotional burden at an already taxing time.

When Willamette Valley Medical Center

opened the H.R. Hoover, MD, Cancer Center in McMinnville, Oregon, it did not merely aim to bring cancer treatment to the area: It wanted to deliver the highest quality treatment available within a framework of compassionate care.

"All of our care is comparable to, if not better than what can be found in large city centers," confirms Carmelina Owens-Smith, Director of Oncology, HRHCC. "We built it with the goal that it could grow with us for the next one to two decades."

The approval of a significant



Carmelina Owens-Smith, Director of Oncology, HRHCC

Quality care at the H.R. Hoover, MD, Cancer Center pairs patient-centric services with leading technologies.

technology package, including a multi-million-dollar linear accelerator, ensures that patients will benefit from the latest evolutions in care.

"This upgrade will give our patients access to leading-edge radiotherapy treatments, typically only available at major medical centers," adds Aaron Sabolch, M.D., Radiation Oncologist, HRHCC. "As a result, when a patient chooses to be treated here, they can have the utmost confidence in the quality of their care."

His colleague Aasheesh Kanwar, M.D., Radiation Oncologist, agrees: "This new technology will expand our ability to deliver high-quality, personalized, and accurate radiation treatments to patients in our community."

The team's surface guided radiation therapy solution, for example, maps the

patient's body and movement patterns to ensure that radiation doses only contact intended targets, shutting off if the beam risks missing its mark. The equipment's ability to track subtle respiration movements improves the treatment of tumors in the lungs and abdomen.

HRHCC's forward-thinking radiation oncologists monitor the latest research and medical trials, quickly pivoting to update treatment plans whenever necessary.

Technology, however, accounts for just one aspect of treatment. The entire team at H.R. Hoover, MD, Cancer Center uses each day as an opportunity to live its core values: championing patient care, doing the right thing, embracing individuality, acting with kindness and making a difference together. They specialize in holistic, patient-centric care that recognizes the entirety of an individual's journey and considers patients' emotional wellbeing to be as crucial as symptom management.

A nurse navigator assigned to each patient helps them understand and utilize the center's wraparound services: counselling, physical therapy, occupational therapy, nutrition, exercise, transportation and more. Like a general contractor coordinating multiple trades, this assigned nurse ensures that each person has access to the full spectrum of available resources.

"A lot of our patients come from rural areas where there is no access to high-speed Wi-Fi, consistent cell service or regular transportation," Owens-Smith explains. "A big focus of ours is to make sure that they are given the exact same opportunities and assistance as anyone else. That's the role of a nurse navigator."

As an example, a typical head and neck cancer patient might require input from a radiation oncologist, surgeon, dietician, GI specialist and dentist. Because of the



extensive nature of care, past patients have graduated from treatment claiming to be in healthier, stabler condition than when they began.

"We had a head and neck patient—a houseless gentleman who came to us at a late stage. He had social and personal issues on entry, and if he had been left to his own devices, he would never have made it through treatment," she recalls. "We were able to, not only get him through treatment, but connect him to resources to get him housing, clean clothing, toiletries, protein supplements and dental care."

This patient's experience exemplifies how HRHCC implements its core values, going beyond typical cancer treatment to support the whole patient on their health journey.

The deep patient-provider connections formed at HRHCC have the power to boost positive outcomes, keeping individuals

committed to treatment when they might otherwise burn out and quit early.

When building relationships, the team benefits from HRHCC's size and a culture that recognizes the importance of taking moments to connect, whether pausing after an appointment or walking people to their cars. Ultimately, HRHCC wants patients to be heard, not hurried out the door.

"We have the freedom to schedule extra time with someone who might need it, due to mobility issues or anything else," Owens-Smith says. "That's the difference we can offer as a smaller center. We don't have to stick to strict 15-minute time slots."

Its values drive stronger community relationships as well, extending HRHCC's positive impact beyond the hospital and into neighborhoods where it is "making a difference together."

"Community outreach is huge for us," she continues. "One of the biggest things that we offer is low-dose lung cancer screenings via CT scans. A great screening process leads to better outcomes."

Its community health fairs push the importance of such screenings, from mammograms to colonoscopies to skin exams. Outreach also includes provider education to spread the word about screenings and resources and impact as many lives as possible.

Armed with the latest and greatest technology, HRHCC looks to the future and the continuous evolution of care. When strategizing how to get the most out of its treatments, the team always comes back to connection, community and, ultimately, its core values. ■

Dr. Aaron Sabolch and Aasheesh Kanwar are radiation oncologists at HRHCC.

