

Support plays crucial role in cancer treatment

BY ANNA WILSON
BLUE RIDGE HEALTHCARE

VALDESE - A diagnosis of cancer can be overwhelming – mentally, physically and financially. Blue Ridge HealthCare has many programs in place to help patients face these challenges so they can focus all their energies on beating the disease.

Behind the scenes, teams are working to make sure cancer patients get the best treatment available. Surgeons, medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, pathologists and radiologists meet with social workers, chaplains, oncology nurses, and other support services members for “cancer conference” twice monthly to discuss the case of each newly diagnosed cancer patient.

The patient’s primary care physician is included in the conference as well. “To me, this is probably one of the most important things we do,” said Jan Hollar, BRHC’s Cancer Care Coordinator. “When I tell patients about the conference, they are so overwhelmed and appreciative. Most people don’t realize we do that.”

The entire team comes up with the very best treatment plan – not only on the clinical side but for support services as well. Support for the patient is as important as the treatment, Hollar said.

Anyone who has had cancer will tell you that the oncology team becomes like family. In fact, in many cases the care team members are the only family for some patients. Hollar tells a story about Kim Ellingson, the manager of radiation oncology at Valdese. “One patient had no family, but he had a cat,” Hollar said. “He was in the hospital and worried about his cat. Kim went to his home and fed his cat. At



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When you’re battling cancer, the oncology team at Blue Ridge HealthCare is ready to help with just about anything you need.

one point, she brought the cat to the hospital for a visit so the patient would feel better.”

There are numerous stories such as this one that illustrates the caliber of people working in oncology, Hollar said.

It also illustrates the commitment Blue Ridge HealthCare has for its patients. Through grants and other fund-raising, the Cancer Care program provides the following free programs:

BREAST CANCER CAMISOLES

These camisoles are half slips for women who have undergone a lumpectomy or mastectomy and have drainage tubes. There’s a pouch inside

the camisole for the tubes so they aren’t as noticeable. The pouch comes in handy afterward to hold a prosthesis.

MEDICATION ASSISTANCE

BRHC has a full-time financial counselor on hand who helps uninsured and underinsured patients by working with drug companies to aid in the cost of chemo drugs. She also helps them find financial resources to assist them in paying for their treatments.

FREE YOGA CLASSES

Restorative yoga helps patients deal with symptoms.

FREE MASSAGE THERAPY

Physicians may prescribe

massage therapy to help with symptom management. Referred patients will receive treatment from certified massage therapists at Phifer Wellness Center.

FREE WIGS, HATS, TURBANS

As part of the Look Good, Feel Better Program, BRHC and the National Cosmetology Association give cancer patients free makeup and show them how to apply it to conceal side effects of chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Patients also get fitted for a free wig and receive a free hat or turban. They also receive lotion to help combat dry skin – another side effect of treatment.

FREE NUTRITIONAL CONSULTS

Nutrition is an important, but often neglected part, of cancer treatment.

Many patients may experience nausea and stress, and are unable to eat. Oncologists say it’s important to keep body weight up in order for the cancer patient to do well.

Blue Ridge HealthCare provides consults for patients who don’t have insurance.

TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE

BRHC provides free transportation to those who cannot drive themselves to the hospital for ongoing treatment.

HOPE CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

This support group meets monthly and is for anyone dealing with any type of cancer.

BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

The members of this support group call themselves the Breast Cancer Action Team. They are active in the community to support breast health education and breast cancer awareness. Each fall this group co-sponsors a breast health symposium.

NATIONAL CANCER SURVIVORS DAY

BRHC provides entertainment and free lunch each year on this national day of celebration for patients who have succeeded in fighting cancer.

In addition, BRHC has a strong community outreach program, which sponsors free health screenings. “Last year, we did more than 800 free prostate screenings and 1,500 colorectal screenings,” Hollar said.

The hospital system teams up with Susan G. Komen Foundation to help provide free mammograms to women who don’t have insurance. “Last year, we provided 200 free mammograms,” Hollar said.

If you don’t have insurance, but need a mammogram, call Hollar at 580-6703.

The hospital offers free tobacco cessation programs, free skin cancer screenings and free programs on cancer prevention. “All of our staff is available to any club or community group wanting a program on cancer and all the materials are free,” Hollar said. “We have an excellent staff.”

ANNA WILSON is a writer and graphic artist in Blue Ridge HealthCare’s Marketing and Public Relations Department.

American College of Surgeons commends cancer program at Blue Ridge HealthCare

The Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons has granted a three-year approval with commendation to the cancer program at Blue Ridge HealthCare’s Valdese Hospital and Grace Hospital.

The designation means the ACoS has recognized the two hospitals as offering high-quality cancer care. Only one in four cancer programs at hospitals across the United States receives this approval.

“It recognizes the quality of our patient care and our commitment to provide Burke County with access to all the various medical specialists involved in diagnosing and treating cancer,” said Debbie Dale, BRHC’s director of oncology. “With a diagnosis of cancer, people face

many difficult medical decisions and emotional situations,” Dale said. “Knowing that our program has been approved lets them know they don’t have to travel far from home to receive excellent care. They can get it right here in Burke County.”

Both Valdese and Grace underwent on-site evaluations by a physician surveyor. The purpose of ACoS approved cancer programs is to make sure hospitals “offer optimal care to the patient with cancer.” ACoS approved cancer programs make sure the best care is given to cancer patients by doing four things:

- Organizing a cancer committee of physicians and other professionals
- Evaluating the care of cancer patients

- Tracking cancer patients over time with a tumor registry
- Measuring how well cancer patients do.

Currently, 39 North Carolina institutions, including Grace and Valdese, are ACoS approved. Greg Jones, MD, a radiation oncologist who has been with the Cancer Center since 1991, said the Valdese center has been continuously accredited since the early 1970s. “That’s an impressive record,” he said. “It is the longest standing continuously accredited community center in the state.”

Blue Ridge HealthCare is finishing up its \$4.6 million renovation of the Cancer Center featuring new, state-of-the-art treatment planning and radiation therapy systems.

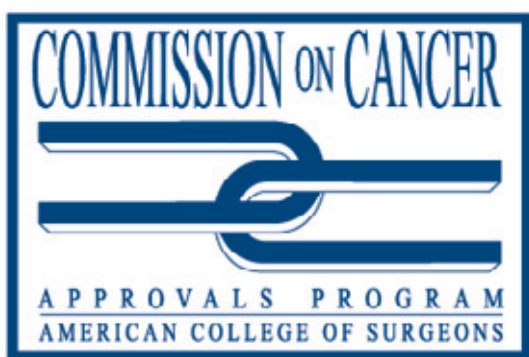
The center will feature curbside parking with a dedicated entrance and covered drop-off for patients. Medical Oncology has been expanded to accommodate a physician office and exam rooms and a larger area with special beds and chairs for patients receiving chemotherapy and non-chemotherapy infusions.

The renovation includes a new look and amenities for oncology and ambulatory care patients. Over half of the treatment space will overlook a special garden where patients and family members can relax or meditate.

“The healing garden will allow the patient who is able to sit out under the trees and enjoy the breeze,” said Sherry Rockett, RN, lead oncology nurse. “They are planting it now.”

Choose The Best Place For Your Cancer Care.

Find this seal of approval and you’ve found the best.



Our oncology program has been recognized by the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons as offering the very best in cancer care. It is a recognition of the quality of our comprehensive, multidisciplinary patient care. We’re dedicated to offering the best cancer care, and are proud to have brought the very best in today’s cancer treatment closer to home.

Valdese Hospital
(828) 879-7589

Grace Hospital
(828) 580-6700

THE CANCER CENTER AT BLUE RIDGE HEALTHCARE



SOWING SEEDS OF HOPE