

**CANCER PROGRAM  
2019 ANNUAL REPORT  
VA-New York Harbor Healthcare System**



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## MESSAGE OF THE CANCER COMMITTEE

The Cancer Committee at VA-New York Harbor Healthcare System (VA-NYHHS) is composed of specialists who are involved in all aspects of care for patients with malignant diseases. The committee meets quarterly and oversees a wide spectrum of cancer-related activities. The Cancer Committee consists of physician representatives from Medical Oncology, Surgery, Radiation Oncology, Urology, Gastroenterology, Pulmonary, Pathology, Palliative Care, Diagnostic Radiology and the Cancer Liaison Physician. Non-physician representation includes Social Work, Psychology, Cancer Registry, Nursing, Cancer Navigation, Cancer Survivorship, Pharmacy and Quality Management.

Since VA-NYHHS became accredited by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer (CoC) in 1996, we have relied on CoC standards of care for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, in conjunction with guidelines from other national cancer organizations and VA, to set the quality criteria for our cancer program.

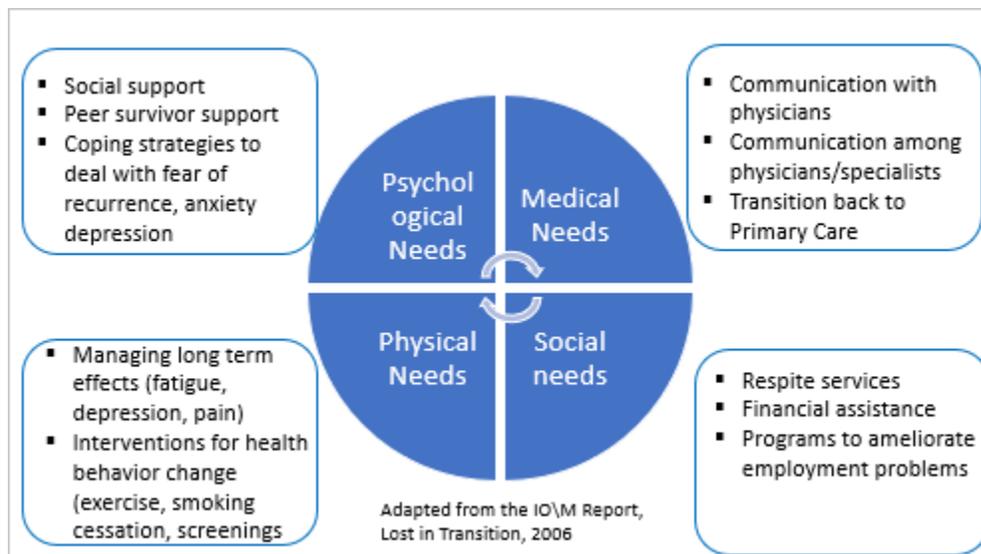
In June 2019, VA-NYHHS had its triennial site visit from the Commission on Cancer and received Full Accreditation with four Commendations, earning our facility a Silver Award. The Commendations were in the areas of Cancer Registry Education, Public Outcomes Reporting, Clinical Trial Accrual and Error-free Data Submission to the National Cancer Database.

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The Patient-Centered program requirements are (1) Survivorship Care Plans provided to patients completing their initial definitive treatment within one year of diagnosis; (2) screening patients for psychosocial distress at least one time during their course of cancer treatment; and (3) providing a navigation process addressing barriers to care for cancer patients. By 2015 the Cancer Committee had these practices in place and in 2019 they continue to be strengthened and broadened.

The figure below represents the holistic approach to cancer care which serves as the goal and the gold standard for VA NYHHS Cancer Program. Individual clinical interactions and cancer program design are challenged to demonstrate the prioritization of the cancer patient and appreciation of his or her experience as a whole person.

### Potential for Programmatic Action To Address Survivor Needs



In addition to the implementation and refinement of the CoC standards, the Cancer Program broadened its scope by participating in the National VA Precision Oncology Program. This program is implementing best practices through genetic analysis of tumor samples and matching results to active therapies, both standard care and within the context of clinical trials. The program also enables research endeavors such as the APOLLO proteogenomic initiative in collaboration with DoD and NCI. The VA National Precision Oncology Program is an excellent program that helps to define and support the concept of modern cancer care in which the focus is on achieving better outcomes for our Veterans.

In 2014, VA-NYHHS continued its expansion of lung cancer screening through low dose CT scans and in 2019, a Nurse Cancer Navigator was recruited to support the timely evaluation and treatment. As a result, a higher proportion of Veterans are being diagnosed with early stage lung cancer with potential for cure.

The Radiation Oncology Service has improved the efficiency, precision and scope of services for radiation treatment of cancer patients at VA-NY Harbor with the Varian True Beam STX linear accelerator. The linear accelerator is the most advanced technology available and provides very precise radiosurgery of brain, lung, spine and other sites of cancer. In 2019, plans have been made to add another Halcyon Linear Accelerator and new 4-D simulation equipment.

Cancer Conferences are an integral part of VA-NYHHS Cancer Program, providing an interdisciplinary forum to discuss the care and appropriate treatment options for patients with cancer. Cancer conference participants include board-certified medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, surgeons, diagnostic radiologists, pathologists, nurses, social workers, psychologists, cancer registrars, quality management and the research coordinator. At each conference, discussion includes a review of the patient's medical history, radiology studies, pathology, AJCC staging, current methods of treatment and available clinical trials. Treatment recommendations based on multidisciplinary consensus and national treatment guidelines, such as National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), are formulated and documented in the electronic medical record.

Cancer Program Practice Profile Reports (CP3R) and Rapid Quality Reporting System (RQRS) are reporting tools from the CoC used to provide feedback on quality indicators for care of patients with colorectal, breast and lung cancer: The CoC hosts the web-based CP3R site to offer cancer programs comparative information to assess their adherence to the standard of care for major cancers. This reporting tool provides a platform to promote continuous practice improvement to improve quality of patient care and permits hospitals to compare their care relative to that of other hospitals. The aim is to empower staff to work collaboratively to implement best practices that will improve cancer care.

The Rapid Quality Reporting System (RQRS) promotes evidence-based care for patients by actively monitoring compliance with National Quality Forum-endorsed measures and surveillance measures for patients on treatment for breast, colon and rectal cancers. RQRS monitors these measures in real-time and provides alerts to the cancer program that assist in meeting timeliness guidelines associated with quality cancer care.

The Palliative Care service works closely with the Cancer Program and offers inpatient, outpatient and telemedicine services for symptom management to all patients and medical, nursing and psychosocial support to patients at the end of life. The Hospice Unit at the St. Albans campus is an important part of the Cancer Program. This state-of-the-art, 15-bed unit provides a comfortable, home-like environment for terminally ill patients and their families with skilled, compassionate care provided by an interdisciplinary team.

Every June for the past 23 years, VA-NYHHS has proudly celebrated National Cancer Survivors Day, which represents the spirit and personal focus NYHHS Cancer Program aspires to create in clinical settings. As we incorporate new Commission on Cancer standards into standard practice, we are pleased and challenged to enter territory we have had in our sights for many years. We look forward to collaborating with the Commission on Cancer to develop and meet performance goals to improve the cancer patient's physical and mental health.

In April 2019, VA-NYHHS held its first head & Neck Cancer Outreach event for screening and prevention strategies. A total of 57 Veterans were screened for Head & Neck cancer and healthcare professionals were available to discuss prevention and early detection techniques. Another major cancer prevention activity of our Cancer Program is *The Great American Smokeout* celebrated in November.

In all of its activities, the Cancer program seeks to make the cancer patient and his/her family the focal point for the organization and delivery of services, ensuring compassionate, technologically advanced and holistic patient care.

## HEMATOLOGY/ONCOLOGY

In recent years increased understanding of the molecular basis of many tumors allows for individualized medical treatment for an increasing number of cancer patients. This trend synchronizes with the practitioner's heightened awareness of the need to attend to the whole patient, including psychological and social needs.

### Outpatient Oncology

Outpatient clinic appointments are held throughout the week for Hematology and Oncology patients and are staffed by physicians, nurse practitioners, and nurses. Each patient is screened by the clinic nurse and evaluated for referral to the dietitian, social worker or psychologist who is available to see urgent referrals immediately. The chemotherapy infusion center is supervised by Oncology trained nurses at each campus, and is in session Monday through Friday. Both campuses have modern and attractive chemotherapy suites, designed with the patient's safety and well-being in mind.

### Inpatient Oncology

When oncology patients require hospitalization, the Hematology/Oncology Consultation Service assists in managing their care. The Hematology/Oncology clinicians have a strong partnership with the interdisciplinary Palliative Care Teams at each campus. Both teams work closely to manage symptoms, participate in Family Meetings and provide emotional and spiritual support to patients and families. The clinical pharmacist is available to review and discuss medication management. Interdisciplinary rounds, conducted twice weekly, include the participation of the attending physicians in Oncology and Palliative Care, the house officers, nurses, social workers, the pharmacist, dietitian, psychologist, chaplain, and the Quality Management specialist.

At the time of discharge, all patients receive counseling regarding medications, clinic follow-up with an oncologist and instructions on how to contact their physician, pharmacist, dietitian, social worker, and psychologist.

Two Palliative Care suites are available at the Brooklyn campus to provide a comfortable environment for family to visit and stay with patients who have terminal illness. The close collaboration between the Oncology and Palliative Care Teams at both campuses provides high quality care by assuring physical comfort, emotional support and spiritual support for the patient and his family.

## RADIATION ONCOLOGY

The VA-NYHHS Department of Radiation Oncology, on-site at the Brooklyn campus, is a dynamic, American College of Radiology accredited, modern radiation oncology service serving Veterans from the New York Metropolitan area and beyond.

Stereotactic Body Radiotherapy (SBRT) and Stereotactic Body Radiosurgery (SRS) are extremely precise radiation therapy treatments that target tumors in the body and brain. With these techniques, high doses of radiation are delivered in one to five doses. VA-NYHHS Department of Radiation Oncology began utilizing SBRT in 2011, treating patients with medically inoperable, early stage lung cancer.

With the acquisition of the Varian True Beam STX in February 2014, the department has been using SRS for brain tumors and SBRT for prostate, lung, liver, spine and abdominal cancers.

SRS and SBRT allow for high dose to the cancerous tissues with minimal radiation to the surrounding normal tissues. For example, in patients with 1 to 4 brain metastases, the metastases alone can be treated while sparing normal brain tissue. Prior to this, patients received whole brain radiation. In 2019, a new Halcyon Linear Accelerator and 4-D simulation equipment were installed to enhance and improve the options for treatment.

SBRT and SRS are available to both inpatients and outpatients. Arrangements can be made for Veterans who come from a distance to stay at the Brooklyn campus hospital.

The Department is well-staffed with 2 full-time registered nurses and multiple dedicated therapists, physicists and physicians.



## SURGICAL ONCOLOGY

Surgical Oncology at VA-NYHHS continues to grow in caseload and sophistication. Surgical Services at the New York and Brooklyn campuses confer with one another to ensure patients benefit from the expertise of the entire surgical staff through participation in Cancer Conferences and as members of the Hepatocellular Cancer Team. Each campus has its particular areas of interest and experience.

VA-NYHHS participates in the National Surgical Quality Improvement Program which is the primary tool for the measurement and analysis of quality surgical outcomes to enhance high quality, safe and timely surgical care. Although surgery is often the definitive treatment for cancer, multidisciplinary partnerships are imperative not only for cure, but also to improve the quality of life for all cancer patients.

VA-NYHHS Surgical Service continues to expand oncology-related services through advances and innovations in surgical approaches, resident and student oncology education and research.

The planned redesign of the Surgery Department will include five new operating rooms with high definition monitors and state-of-the-art laparoscopic towers.

The Surgical service provides advanced robotic and laparoscopic surgery for colorectal cancer as well as state-of-the-art surgical care for oncology-related nephrectomy, prostatectomy, endocrine tumors and radiofrequency ablation of liver tumors. The Surgical Service also provides high quality surgical care for patients with primary and secondary liver tumors including, but not limited to, routine and complex liver resections, laparoscopic resections of liver tumors, and radiofrequency ablation. The Surgical Service provides treatment for a broad range of complex gastro-intestinal malignancies, such as esophageal, gastric, duodenal, biliary, pancreatic and colorectal cancers. The service uses robotic and minimally invasive approaches when appropriate for all GI malignancies and performs complete cytoreductions and peritoneal perfusions (HIPEC) for patients with peritoneal carcinomatosis. All cases treated by the Surgical Service are discussed at the multidisciplinary Tumor Board meetings and the combined Surgery/GI conferences.

### *Breast Health Center*

The Center continues to expand, offering consultations in the Women's clinic every other week. A surgical attending, radiologist and cytopathologist meet with women who have suspicious breast masses and provide expert evaluation and counseling. Enhanced, on-site breast imaging services have also been added. This clinic was developed to improve access for women to timely services for the evaluation of breast neoplasms.

The New York campus is the referral center for plastic reconstructive, microvascular reconstructive, neurological and thoracic surgery in addition to full service general, urology and head and neck surgery services.

### *General surgery*

Surgeons are skilled in new minimally invasive surgical procedures for treating tumors of the esophagus, pancreas, liver, colon and rectum. In addition, Hyperthermic Intra-peritoneal Chemotherapy (HIPEC) is offered for selected cases of colorectal cancer and mesothelioma.

## **SURGICAL ONCOLOGY (continued)**

Special expertise in hepatobiliary, gastroesophageal and colorectal surgery is supplied by surgical oncologists. Cases are managed by the surgical service in cooperation with medical gastroenterology. Oncology cases are discussed weekly for evidence-based treatment planning during both the interdisciplinary Tumor Board (surgical, radiation and medical oncology, diagnostic and interventional radiology, pathology and gastroenterology) and the interdisciplinary VA-NYU Gastrointestinal Conference. Gross and histopathology of all cancer cases are discussed with the surgical pathologists in a weekly case review and staging conference.

### *Neurological Surgery*

Brain and spinal cord tumors are staged with neuroradiology and neurology at the weekly combined VA-NYU Neurosurgery Conference. In addition to staff neurosurgeons, experts in all phases of neurosurgical oncology are available to discuss patients. Skull base tumors, including pituitary and acoustic, are operated jointly with the ENT skull base/neuro-otology group.

### *Cancer of the Head and Neck*

The management of malignancies of the head and neck is increasingly multidisciplinary, with surgery and radiotherapy as mainstays of treatment and chemotherapy as adjuvant. The head and neck surgery service at the New York campus is a tertiary referral service offering the entire spectrum of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures to head and neck and endocrine patients. The outpatient clinic is equipped for outpatient procedures and ultrasound guided biopsies. A dedicated speech and swallow therapist is part of the management team and provides care to all head and neck cancer patients. The entire gamut of head and neck cancer procedures are performed at the New York campus, including: trans-oral robotic surgery, trans-oral minimally invasive laser surgery, free flap reconstruction, endoscopic skull base surgery, and facial reanimation. The center is equipped to perform the most complex surgeries in collaboration with neurosurgery and thoracic surgery. All patients treated at the New York campus are presented at a multidisciplinary tumor board conference and receive recommendations from all modalities.

The head and neck service collaborates closely with thoracic and gastrointestinal surgery and is the referral center for Brooklyn patients, as well as patients from Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 2.

### *Urology*

At the multidisciplinary urologic oncology conference, all options for care, including minimally invasive and open techniques including nerve sparing prostatectomy are discussed. Patients with prostate cancer are evaluated and followed longitudinally. The robotic da Vinci surgical system is an available option, enabling surgeons to perform operations through a few small incisions which allow the surgeon's hand movements to be translated into smaller, precise movements of tiny instruments inside the patient's body.

## THORACIC ONCOLOGY

Pulmonary Service continues its interdisciplinary work in conjunction with the other key specialties to develop Thoracic Oncology at both campuses.

The Interventional Pulmonary program continues to develop innovations to improve the treatment and quality of life for patients with unresectable, relapsed and refractory lung cancer, as well as those with certain non-malignant conditions.

These innovations include new techniques and new equipment to achieve:

- earlier diagnosis
- more precise staging
- better quality of life

These techniques include the use of Endobronchial Ultrasound (EBUS) which was initiated in 2008 at the Brooklyn campus. EBUS is a sensitive modality for staging lung cancer. This approach increases the accuracy of cancer staging. Radial EBUS is used to investigate lung nodules which are difficult to assess by more traditional methods. EBUS also offers a reliable way to evaluate invasion of bronchial and vascular structures in a less invasive manner than surgery.

The Thoracic Oncology program also addresses problems such as central airway obstruction and the related complications of bleeding and post obstructive pneumonia. Rigid bronchoscopy is routinely employed for placement and retrieval of airway stents used to establish and maintain airway patency.

These advanced stents include the Aero Hybrid Stents and other covered metallic Self-Expanding-Stents such as the Ultraflex as well as silicone stents. Medical authorities consider aero stents to be the state-of-the-art.

Other treatments such as balloon bronchoplasty and tumor ablation are also used to treat airway obstruction to improve shortness of breath, decrease the risk of pneumonia, and improve quality of life. These methods have the advantage of providing immediate relief of obstruction even in patients receiving other treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

Malignant Pleural effusion management is another area of expertise of the Pulmonary team at the Brooklyn campus. Given the recent expansion and adoption of thoracic ultrasonography, sampling effusion under sonographic guidance and placement of tunneled pleural catheters for palliative therapy of refractory malignant effusion are performed routinely by the Brooklyn VA Pulmonary section.

Pulmonary Service continues to offer Pulmonary Interventional Consultations to other facilities in VISN 2 for the management of thoracic oncology patients and non-malignant airway disease. It is expected that the need for consultative services will grow as both primary therapy for lung cancer and palliative techniques improve and expand.

Life-threatening complications of malignant diseases such as trachea-esophageal fistula are now referred to Pulmonary Interventional Service rather than proceeding to surgery.

In summary, the need for Pulmonary Intervention procedures is expected to grow with continued improvement in the treatment of thoracic malignancy. These procedures will provide more opportunity for patients to ultimately receive effective chemotherapy and radiation therapy with improved overall treatment outcomes, including improved survival.

### *Innovations*

*The Brooklyn VA is a referral center for Bronchoscopic Electromagnetic Navigation (EMN).*

EMN is used to access lung nodules in a precise and less risky manner. To date more than 50 nodules have been sampled with high yield and few complications. In

addition, this new technology permits the placement of markers to aid in delivery of more precise treatment by stereotactic body radiotherapy, sparing normal healthy lung tissue and reducing complications.

Tissue yield from EMN is adequate for molecular, genetic and immunologic testing and it is deemed safe in advanced COPD.

## HEPATOCELLULAR CANCER TEAM

Hepatocellular cancer is the most common type of liver cancer globally, the fastest growing cancer in the United States and the eighth leading cause of death. This trend is expected to continue until the peak of the hepatitis C epidemic in 2020.

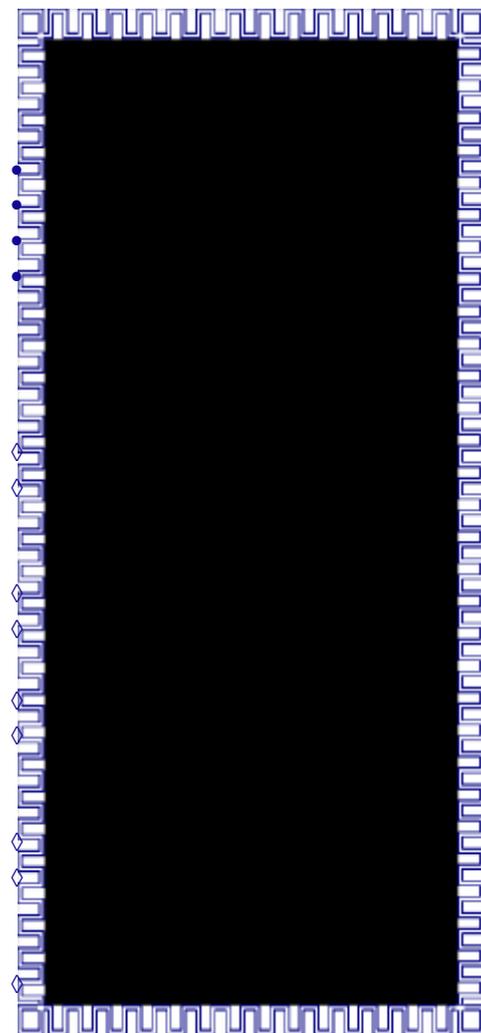
In 2017, VA-NYHHS Hepatocellular Cancer (HCC) Team continued its commitment to standardize care for HCC patients and created a network of VISNs engaged in VISN-wide HCC Tumor Boards.

Interdisciplinary teams created from disciplines across the VISN, including medical oncology, nursing, gastroenterology, hepatology, surgery, radiology, palliative care, social work, telehealth, information technology and cancer registry were sustained and collaborated on patients presented.

VA-NYHHS innovations in HCC treatment are now provided in VISNs across VA. VISN 2 Downstate weekly VA SCAN ECHO Liver Cancer

Tumor Boards are being shared with VISNs via video technology to discuss cases, view radiology and pathology and make recommendations for treatment.

In March 2019, VA NY Harbor hosted the annual VA Liver Cancer Summit in Miami. As in previous years, the seminar provided updates on HCC care and facilitated collaboration and innovation, promulgating best practices in HCC management nationwide. The annual seminar is a venue for interactive discussion by VA and non-VA subject matter experts, includes faculty from VISNs 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 16 and 20 and is streamed live throughout VA. Our team also created two consensus documents on Liver Imaging and creation of Multidisciplinary Regional Tumor Boards, posted on the National VA Hepatitis website to aid teams nationally with assembling Tumor Boards and the surveillance, diagnosis and management of patients.





## PALLIATIVE CARE

As a member of the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 2 Palliative Care program, the New York Harbor Palliative Care Service shared in the recognition by the *American Hospital Association's 2010 Circle of Life Award*. This prestigious award recognizes programs that provide excellent end of life care and that serve as innovative models of delivery of palliative care for the nation.

The Palliative Care service continues to be active on all three campuses, Brooklyn, New York and St. Albans, with the goal of providing interdisciplinary expert care to all patients in need of symptom management and to patients who have life-limiting disease. There are active inpatient and outpatient consultation services in Brooklyn and New York with a newly initiated telemedicine clinic for patients who have difficulty attending the clinic in person.

The Palliative Care Service is also an active member of the VISN 2 Hospice Veterans Partnership, working closely with our partners in the local hospice organizations.

*Papillon de Vie—Butterflies of Life* is the name of the state of the art 15 bed dedicated Hospice and Palliative Care (HPC) Unit at our Community Living Center in St. Albans. The mission of the HPC Unit is to provide personalized care to each Veteran. The Veteran's and family's preferences for care are clarified and honored to maintain the comfort and dignity of each Veteran while caring for his or her emotional, spiritual, physical and psychological needs in a beautiful, home-like environment. Veterans' families are welcomed and accommodated on the unit.

**Semiannual Memorial Services** are held for staff and the family of patients who died within the past year. During these services, patients are remembered and honored for their military service.

## PATIENT SERVICES

Patient Services includes nursing, social work, clerical support, pharmacy, nutrition and pastoral care.

Operations are organized on a patient-centered care model which aligns services around patients rather than in individual departments. Programs for care are decentralized from the departmental level and grouped along diagnostic categories, such as Oncology.

The Oncology Patient Care Team Coordinators at each campus are registered nurses who are responsible for the direct supervision of inpatient and outpatient oncology nursing, including Radiation Therapy and chemotherapy, and coordination with the allied health and other support staff in all assigned areas.

### *Oncology Nursing*

The nursing staff continues its commitment to excellent care with a focus on the relief of the symptoms of cancer as well as the comfort of patients and their families. The staff provides a compassionate environment for the patients' physical and emotional comfort. The cross training of staff in both the inpatient and outpatient treatment areas has enhanced the continuity of care.

All nursing practices are based on Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) standards of practice with specific nursing competencies for chemotherapy and radiation therapy. Oncology Nurses are responsible for the safe delivery of all chemotherapeutic agents in the hospital, including the outpatient and inpatient settings. Nursing provides patient/family education including specific treatment regimes, anticipated outcomes/side effects of treatments.

Both campuses have modern and renovated chemotherapy suites, designed for the comfort and safety of inpatients and outpatients.

Oncology Nurses work closely with Radiation Oncology, Medical Oncology, Pharmacy, Pastoral Care, Nutrition and Quality Management, Social Work and Psychology. Nursing Team Leaders participate in the weekly meetings with representatives from each service

Ongoing educational opportunities for nurses in oncology and palliative care are met with enthusiasm. The ELNEC (End of Life Nursing Education Consortium) course which addresses critical aspects of

end-of-life care has been attended by all skill levels of nursing staff. Oncology Nursing Society membership remains strong. Staff are in compliance with established policies, procedures, and ONS standards regarding the care and treatment of oncology patients.

### *Social Work Service*

Oncology Social Work (SW) collaborates with the interdisciplinary treatment team to provide comprehensive psychosocial oncology services in all clinical areas that treat patients with cancer, including the Palliative Care Service. Oncology SW provides assistance to patients under the policies and procedures of the Community and Social Services division of Patient Services. These SWs are PhD or Masters level practitioners, holding state licenses appropriate to their position and are dedicated to advancing their practice by attending continuing education programs that enhance clinical practice, skills and knowledge of community resources. They adhere to the Codes of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Association of Oncology Social Work (AOSW) and demonstrate competencies in accordance with the standards for healthcare social workers of NASW.

Oncology SWers provide assessment, counseling, case management, continuity of care/discharge planning, psycho-education, community liaison and end-of-life care for patients and their families affected by cancer. They strive to establish and maintain therapeutic relationships with patients and their caregivers to decrease the anxiety associated with the initial news of a cancer diagnosis. By offering individualized plans of care including assessment, supportive counseling and referrals for tangible services such as transportation, homecare and specialized support groups, oncology social workers intervene in practical ways to improve patient and family coping at a particularly stressful time in their lives. Oncology SWers assure appropriate representation of patient and caregiver perspectives in interdisciplinary team meetings, in program planning venues and in staff education activities.

Psychosocial distress screening and patient navigation interventions for new cancer patients is a joint pilot project with Psychology Service.

Oncology SWers assess new patients for their potential to claim Service Connected Compensation for military related cancer exposure such as Vietnam Era patients for Agent Orange exposure and Marines assigned to Camp Lejeune and exposed to its contaminated water. Awareness of the relationship between cancer and environmental exposure is a developing area of practice. SWers knowledgeable in this area are helping Veterans receive treatment for illnesses resulting from exposures during their service and receive other benefits from the VA.

As the Veteran population ages, there is a need for consultation with geriatricians and palliative care specialists to develop an understanding of the psychosocial needs of older patient with cancer. It is important as well to help these individuals define their quality of life, and help them achieve it. To this end, Oncology Social Workers assesses patients for readiness to engage in Advance Directive discussions and assists patients in documenting health care proxies and goals of care.

### *Pastoral Care*

The primary role of the Chaplain is to provide for the spiritual and, when appropriate and requested by the patient or caregivers, religious care within the holistic approach of the care team. The Chaplain visits the patient and assesses their spiritual and religious needs and, if requested by the patient, offers prayers and religious rituals according to the patient's faith tradition. The chaplain visits the patient before and after surgery and on a regular basis during a patient's stay in the hospital. The Chaplain is available when the patient becomes discouraged or when an event occurs that affects the patient's hope for recovery. The chaplain also assists the patient in coping with the lifestyle limitations and difficult choices that lie before him/her. Staff and team members make good use of the Chaplains' expertise as pastoral, spiritual and religious needs arise.

A VA training program for clinical pastoral education program was initiated at New York Harbor in 2001. This program has improved staff awareness of patients who appreciate spiritual and/or religious support. Chaplains and pastoral education residents contribute their spiritual sensibilities to the care inpatients and outpatients receive in the Cancer Program.

## PHARMACY SERVICE

Pharmacy service has dedicated full-time pharmacists at each campus for the preparation of chemotherapy. Each is assisted by a full-time pharmacist. The pharmacists screen patient charts for height, weight, allergies, concurrent therapy and pertinent laboratory values and all physician orders for appropriateness of dose, indication and duration of therapy. The pharmacist counsels all patients on their medications and is a resource for drug information for both medical and nursing staff and acts as a liaison between the medical staff and the pharmaceutical companies, consulting with them regarding new therapies, administration of medications and new indications for an approved drug. A recent trend has been a greater use of oral chemotherapy as maintenance therapy for select disease states. By close contact and communication with the medical and nursing staff, the pharmacists contribute significantly toward the safe, efficient and cost-effective administration of chemotherapeutic agents to our patients.

The clinical pharmacist performs many functions for cancer inpatients. The pharmacist not only provides medication counseling to all inpatients at the time of discharge but also improves medication distribution by facilitating drug approvals and one-time drug requests, monitoring missed doses, reviewing and overseeing physician orders and monitoring the use of opioids. The pharmacist is also a resource for information about medications, drug interactions, adverse effects and dosage and participates in interdisciplinary rounds, assists in the preparation of pharmacologic guidelines for oncology patients and provides lectures to the nursing staff on topics related to the care of cancer patients.

***A BioSafe  
Cleanroom  
designed specifically  
for compounding  
sterile hazardous  
drugs, such as anti-  
neoplastics and  
hormonal therapies  
is being built at each  
campus in  
compliance with  
USP 800***

## DIAGNOSTIC RADIOLOGY AND NUCLEAR MEDICINE

The Radiology and Nuclear Medicine Services are essential in detecting, evaluating and monitoring patients with cancer. Services provided by these departments include the performance and interpretation of conventional radiographic examinations, fluoroscopic studies of gastrointestinal and genitourinary tracts, CAT scans, ultrasound examinations, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), mammography, angiography and radionuclide studies. In 2015 a Positron Emission Tomography/Computed Tomography (PET/CT) was installed at the Brooklyn campus. Installation of the PET/CT Discovery 710 by General Electric is the latest example of the constantly improving technology which characterizes Radiology and Nuclear Medicine at VA NYHHS.

Our PET Scan was installed in 2015. Prior to this year, PET Scans were obtained by sending outpatients to non-VA contracted facilities.

Advantages to PET Scan on-site include:

- 1- Ease and convenience for patients
- 2- Automatic capture and inclusion of PET images within the VA Imaging System
- 3- Easy access to PET data for clinical decision-making
- 4- Availability of PET technology for inpatients
- 5- Better coordination of care among cancer treating specialties

Interventional Radiology offers biopsies, aspiration and drainage of pleural, biliary and genitourinary tracts, long-term peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) placement, percutaneous feeding tube placement, tumor embolization and intra-arterial chemotherapy access for hepatocellular cancers.

All Radiology exams are captured digitally since the implementation of Picture Archive Communications System (PACS) in 2005. This technology facilitates rapid interpretation and dissemination of all patient imaging exams.



PET Scan at the Brooklyn  
campus, VA-NYHHS

## PSYCHOLOGY

The psychologist participates on the interdisciplinary treatment team and provides services in inpatient and outpatient Hematology/Oncology, Chemotherapy and Radiation Oncology clinics. Through health and behavior interventions, psychology fellows, under the supervision of the psychologist, work with the oncology physicians and nurses to monitor at-risk patients and support their compliance with medical treatment. The psychology fellows perform clinical assessments and provide interventions with the goals of supporting medical decision-making, assisting with patient compliance, providing education, and support groups with collaboration from Chaplaincy. Evidence based psychotherapies including cognitive-behavioral therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy and meaning-centered psychotherapy are offered to address depression, anxiety and existential issues that impact patients with cancer. The psychology service also assists in the management of potential crisis situations as they arise in the context of medical therapy. Psychology also conducts a weekly cancer support group for outpatients where psycho-education and support is provided on topics related to cancer treatment, adjustment and coping skills. Many of the participants are long terms attendees and have become good friends.

Psychology service introduced Pet Therapy to the VA-NYHHS Cancer Program in 2012 and by now several generations of therapy dogs have joined. Both our psychologist and therapy dog were highlighted in the February 29, 2016 New York Times article, *Turning your Pet into a Therapy Dog*. The psychologist who coordinates the Pet Therapy Program said, "The presence of therapy dogs makes such a difference. Many ask when they'll next be back. A big dog can put his head on a patients' bed and you can actually see them relax."

Each new patient admitted to inpatient and outpatient oncology service receives a screen for psychosocial distress. For those who show a need for further psychological services, there is an initial health and behavior assessment for hospital depression and anxiety, cognition and quality of life. Psychologists routinely screen and assess patients for suicide risk, depression, alcohol and substance use and PTSD, insomnia and pain management. These disorders may be related to their medical conditions or pre-existing mental health issues.

Psychology has partnered with Social Work to develop navigation plans. Depending on the needs of the patient, a plan is developed for follow-up from psychology, social work, nursing or medicine. Implementation of these navigation plans has been shown to reduce stigma and make it more likely that a patient will be open to receiving psychological services to support their cancer care.



## ANATOMIC PATHOLOGY

Anatomic Pathology offers the latest technology and evaluation in surgical pathology, cytopathology, immunopathology, dermatopathology, and electron microscopy.

By providing detailed analysis and discussion of selected tumors, Pathology makes an essential contribution to the weekly Tumor Board conferences.

The pathologist's presentation of the histology and cytology of the tumors, with reference to staging and prognostic indicators, add an important contribution to treatment planning.

Immunohistochemistry, immunofluorescence, and flow cytometry are important contributors to the diagnosis. The laboratory offers over 100 antibodies to aid in identification of tumors, leading to improved classification of unknown primary cancers.

Cytopathology services include fine needle aspirations of lymph nodes and subcutaneous nodules performed by a Board-certified cytopathologist.

Since 2010, the Pathology Service has been using the SurePath methodology which is more sensitive in detecting abnormalities and facilitates diagnosis in a number of ways.

A significant role of the QM specialist is to ensure program compliance with accrediting agencies such as the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons and the Joint Commission. This is done by serving as the facility experts on accrediting agency standards and methods required for full compliance with the standards.

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## QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The Cancer Quality Improvement (QI) Coordinator, an active member of the Cancer Committee, and the QI Specialist, who attends and participates in General, Pulmonary and Thoracic Tumor Boards, provide QI skills and guidance to the Cancer Program. The QI Coordinator monitors and reports to the Cancer Committee at least 2 quality improvement activities each year, including corrective actions if indicated.

The QI Coordinator leads the Cancer Committee in developing, analyzing and documenting two studies that the CoC requires every year that measure the quality of care and outcomes for cancer patients.

Completion of a study of quality must provide data results that serve as the first step in the QI process. One QI each year is the result of data collected from a Quality Study conducted by the Cancer Committee. The second improvement can be based on any study or relevant data source.

The QI staff supports the Cancer Program's compliance with nationally recognized guidelines such as those of the national Comprehensive Cancer Network, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals and the College of American Pathology.

## PHYSICAL MEDICINE AND REHABILITATION

The Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) Service supports the cancer program by minimizing impairment and reducing activity limitations of cancer patients through a coordinated, interdisciplinary approach to patient care. The PM&R Service is integrated across all campuses of VA New York Harbor Healthcare System and encompasses physiatry, physical therapy, occupational therapy, kinesiotherapy, and vocational therapy staff. This core group of clinicians works closely with recreation therapy, psychology, neuropsychology, speech pathology and audiology, nursing and social service staff to form a dynamic extended rehabilitation team. As more patients become cancer survivors, the role of PM&R in the lives of survivors

continues to expand.

We have introduced and continue to develop our new specialty programs available to cancer patients that address pelvic floor dysfunction, lymphedema, and vestibular issues. An interventional pain management service provides new alternatives in the treatment of malignant and non-malignant pain.

The PM&R Service works also closely with the Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service to provide veterans in the cancer program and others with the proper adaptive equipment and assistive devices. Through the Housing and Structural Alterations Program, Veterans are provided with financial assistance to obtain

necessary home modifications such as ramps. Through the Major Medical Equipment Committee, Veterans are provided with high-quality equipment as clinically necessary.

Patients receive both inpatient and outpatient therapy services. Patients who require bedside services are seen regularly on the inpatient units. All other patients are seen in the designated therapeutic areas to encourage independence, socialization and psychological well-being.

As an integral part of the care of patients in the cancer program, the PM&R team works to improve both the functional status and the quality of life of Veterans with cancer.

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## AUDIOLOGY AND SPEECH PATHOLOGY

The Audiology and Speech Pathology Service provides diagnostic and rehabilitation services to patients with communication and swallowing disorders. These disorders include hearing loss, dizziness, aphasia, dysphagia, laryngectomy, glossectomy, confusion and dementia, dysarthria, memory disorders,

and problems with voice production. Patients with neurogenic and mechanical swallowing disorders are also managed. The Service provides comprehensive hearing evaluation services, auditory brainstem response evaluations, and vestibular assessments. Prostheses, such as hearing aids, assistive listening devices

and electrolarynxes are provided to eligible Veterans. Fiberoptic evaluations of swallowing disorders are conducted with Otolaryngology Service and video-fluoroscopic studies of swallowing disorders are conducted with Radiology Service.

## AUDIOLOGY AND SPEECH PATHOLOGY (CONTINUED)

In addition to individual services, there are several support programs including the Communication/Stroke and Laryngectomy groups. Families of patients with swallowing disorders are provided counseling about how to

maximize the nutritional content of the patient's recommended diet and assure that the rehabilitative swallowing techniques taught to the patient are used in the home setting. Family members are also counseled

about communication disorders, teaching them the best methods to help the patient communicate effectively.

## CANCER REGISTRY

The Cancer Registry is a vital part of the Cancer Program and coordinates the collection, management, analysis and dissemination of information on cancer patients who are diagnosed and treated at the VA-NYHHS. Our registry has a reference date of January 1, 1996 and was computerized in 1990.

The Cancer Registry is staffed by one Certified Tumor Registrar and one Registrar in training and is supervised by the Cancer Committee. In 2011, the registry began to participate in the CoC's Rapid Quality Reporting System (RQRS), which provides the facility rapid case specific feedback for certain treatment milestones in real-time to allow for adjustments in the patient's treatment.

In 2018, 304 new analytical cases were added to the registry with a total number of 23,000 cases since its reference date. The data is electronically stored and submitted to the National Cancer Data Base (NCDB), allowing comparison with other hospitals and national data.

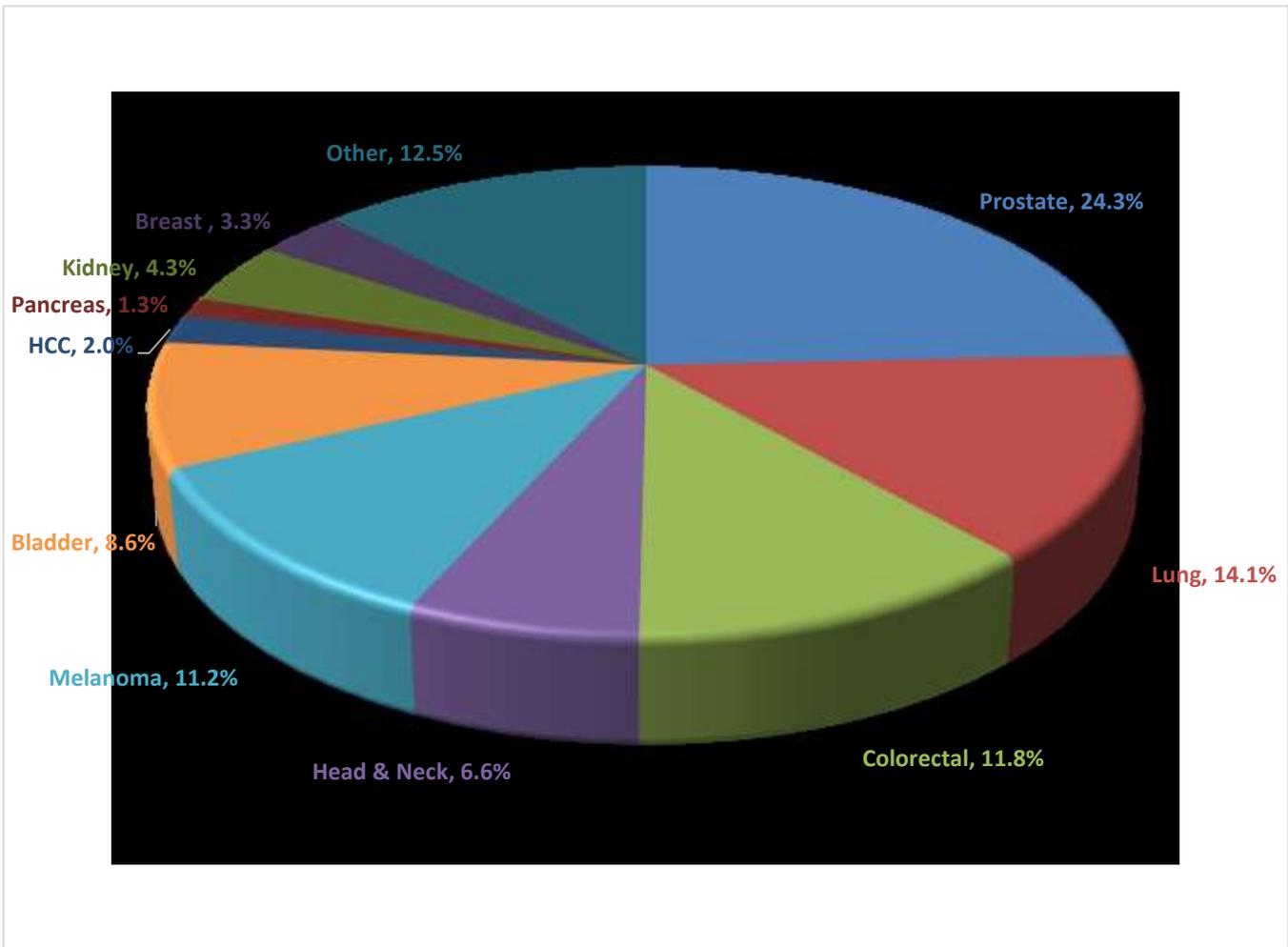
Annual follow-up of patients is an important function of the registry and the procedure for follow-up is based on guidelines recommended by the Commission on Cancer. Tracing and surveillance of registered cancer patients assures continuity of care, early detection of recurrent or new primary tumors, and appropriate patient follow-up. Our follow-up tracking and surveillance rate for all eligible patients in the registry from the reference date meets the CoC standard of 80%.

The registry is also required to track follow-up rates for patients diagnosed within the last 5 years. Our follow-up rate for these patients also meets the Commission on Cancer's standard of 90%.

Utilization of the cancer registry data is monitored by the Physician Supervisor and is another important function to promote clinical research and continuous analysis of the data. Utilization of this data contributes to the effectiveness of patient care and the Cancer Committee encourages frequent use of the Cancer Registry database.

SUMMARY OF THE CANCER REGISTRY DATA FOR 2018

Selected data of the Cancer Registry of VA-NYHHS for 2018 is presented below.



The total number of analytical cases in 2018 is 304, decreased from the number of cases in 2017 (368). The figure above illustrates the site distribution for newly diagnosed malignancies in 2018. The five major sites are prostate (24.3%), lung (14.1%), colorectal (11.8%), melanoma (11.2%) and urinary bladder (8.6%). Prostate cancer is still the leading malignancy with 74 new cases in 2018, representing approximately one quarter of cases this year. Lung cancer is the second most common at 14.1%, with 43 new cases in 2018, compared to 60 new cases in 2017. For the third year in a row, melanoma is among the top 5 sites with 34 new cases.

Analysis of the ethnicity of the cancer cases in the cancer registry shows that 52% are Caucasian, 43% are African American and 5% are other ethnicities, representing Hispanic and Asian Americans. This year, as in previous years, the majority of prostate cancer cases were seen in African Americans (55%) than in Caucasians (38%). This year, lung cancer was higher among African Americans (54%) than Caucasians (40%). As in national data, bladder cancer shows a higher rate in Caucasians (65%) compared to African Americans (31%).

## **Outcomes Report on Accountability and Quality Improvement Measures**

### Cancer Quality Improvement Program (CQIP) Annual Report 2018

CQIP is data-driven, process and outcomes-based cancer quality improvement initiative that confidentially reports to 1,500 individual CoC-accredited hospitals their data as entered in National Cancer Data Base (NCDB), including comparisons with national data from all CoC-accredited programs. This report is unique in providing both short-term quality and outcome data and also long-term outcome data. CQIP allows programs to assess their quality and outcomes based on data submitted to the NCDB.

The current release of the Annual Report of 2018 provides data on:

- Cancer Program Data
- CoC Quality Accountability and Quality Improvement Measure Reports
- Volume of Selected Complex Cancer Operations with 30-day and 90-day mortality after selected cancer operations
- Site-specific reports for breast, colon, NSCLC, prostate and melanoma
- Twenty-three quality measure reports for 10 disease sites: bladder (3), breast (6), cervix (3), colon (2), endometrium (2), gastric (1), kidney (1), non-small cell lung (3), ovary (1), and rectum (1).

The major findings of the CQIP report were presented at the April, 2019 Cancer Committee meeting and subsequently to Medical Center Leadership.

Cancer Program Volume (2012–2016) – total case volume for this time period decreased from 585 cases in 2012 to 436 cases in 2016. The top two sites in 2016 were prostate (94) and non-small cell lung cancer (75). The major reason for the decrease in cancer program volume is the discontinuation of the sharing agreement with Radiation Oncology to provide services to non-Veterans.

Cancer Program In/Out Migration (2012–2016) The percentage of patients diagnosed here and treated here increased from 75% to 83% over this time period.

### Quality Measure Reports: Accountability and Quality Improvement

The Commission on Cancer reports several types of quality measures and reviewed here are the Accountability and Quality Improvement (QI) Measures relevant to Veterans diagnosed and/or treated at VA-NYHHS in 2016. Accountability Measures are considered the current standard of care based on clinical trial evidence. QI Measures demonstrate good practice based on consensus, although not usually based on clinical trial evidence.

### Breast Cancer Accountability Measures

- Although the total number of patients with breast cancer at VA-NYHHS is low, compliance with the accountability measures was excellent when there were adequate cases: *Adjuvant hormonal therapy for hormone receptor positive breast cancer*: 100% vs all CoC programs 92.5%. There were not enough cases for the following accountability measures: (1) *Breast irradiation after breast conserving surgery*, (2) *Combination chemotherapy for hormone receptor negative breast cancer*, (3) *Post-mastectomy radiation for women with 4 or more positive regional lymph nodes*.

### Breast Cancer QI Measure

Compliance with the breast cancer QI measure: *image or palpation-guided needle biopsy is performed for the diagnosis of breast cancer*: 100% vs all CoC programs 90%. The Cancer Committee discussed the improvement in this measure from the last CQIP report from 2015 showing 75% compliance with this measure.

### Colon Cancer Accountability Measure

Compliance with the accountability measure *adjuvant chemotherapy for lymph node positive colon cancer*: 100% vs all CoC programs 89%

Colon Cancer QI Measure: *removal of at least 12 lymph nodes at the time of definitive surgery for colon cancer*: 100% vs all CoC programs 93%. This measure improved from 88% in the 2016 report.

Gastric QI Measure: *at least 15 regional lymph nodes were removed and pathologically examined for resected gastric cancer* had too few cases for analysis.

Non Small Cell Lung Cancer QI Measures: *surgery is not the first course of treatment for cN2 M0 cases*: 100% vs all CoC programs 93%. There were too few cases to assess the Quality Improvement measure on *chemotherapy for pre- or post-operatively resected non-small cell lung cancer*.

### Stage Distribution in 2016

Colon and Prostate Cancer - stage distribution at VA-NYHHS is similar to all CoC hospitals. Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer - at VA-NYHHS, a higher proportion of patients were diagnosed with early stage disease (Stage 0, I or II) ( 53%) compared to all CoC (40%) and a smaller proportion of patients diagnosed with Stage IV (24%) compared to all CoC (39%).

Melanoma – at VA-NYHHS, a higher proportion of patients were diagnosed with early stage disease (Stage 0 or I) (94%) compared to all CoC (72%).

Breast Cancer: There were not enough breast cancer patients diagnosed in 2016 at VA-NYHHS to assess stage distribution.

Conclusions:

For most measures compliance with CoC quality measures meets or exceeds other CoC programs. The following observations were made:

1. Cancer Program Volume from 2012 to 2016: the total case volume for this time period decreased from 585 cases in 2012 to 435 cases in 2016. The major reason for the decrease in cancer program volume is the discontinuation of the sharing agreement with Radiation Oncology to provide services to non-Veterans.
2. All Accountability and Quality Improvement measures are at 100% compliance.
3. Patients were diagnosed with early stage non-small cell lung cancer (Stage 0, I and II) and melanoma (Stages 0 and I) at VA-NYHHS than in all other CoC hospitals indicating early detection, perhaps due to screening or close follow-up.

## CLINICAL CANCER RESEARCH

Participation in clinical cancer research is one of the features of a state of the art cancer program and is a requirement for accreditation status with the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons. The Commission requires this standard to assure patients and their families the opportunity to participate in recent advances in cancer treatment and to encourage cancer research.

Cancer Research at VA-NYHHS is currently engaged in the studies sponsored by the Prostate Cancer Research Foundation: (1) The identification of targetable prostate cancer alterations through tumor DNA screening and (2) The impact of Oral metastatic castrate resistant prostate cancer Therapies Stewardship Pilot Program for Veterans

One of our 2016 Cancer Program Goals was to enroll in the National VA Precision Oncology Program and in 2018, this goal was accomplished. This program is implementing best practices through genetic analysis of tumor samples and matching results to active therapies, both standard care and within the context of clinical trials. The program also enables research endeavors such as the APOLLO proteogenomic initiative in collaboration with DoD and NCI. Leadership at the Commission on Cancer has reviewed the programs and has determined that the requirements of Standard 1.9, the Clinical Trial Accrual, can be met by facilities by submitting tumor specimens for analysis within the VA National Precision Oncology Program. Each patient that is tested would count toward the 2% of the annual analytic case load minimum. This modification of the Standard assisted VA-NYHHS in achieving Commendation for Research Accrual at our site visit in 2019.

Treatment guidelines developed as a result of clinical trials are made available for clinicians across the country and around the world so they can deliver the best treatment for their patients. Today, there are more than 10 million cancer survivors in the United States, in large part because of the work that has been done in clinical trials.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH & PREVENTION

The Cancer Program's major community outreach event is the annual Cancer Survivors Day Celebration, now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year. Every June, we invite cancer survivors, their families, patients and staff from the New York and Brooklyn campuses, to join together for an afternoon of celebration. The event includes a talk by one of our Cancer Survivors, refreshments, and entertainment generously provided by talented performers.



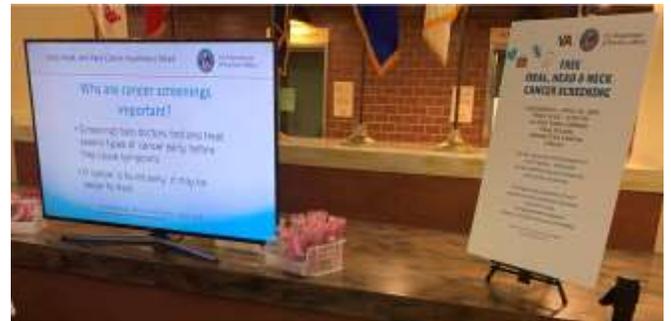
Annually, we hold an event to increase Veteran awareness of colon cancer screening and prevention. The Super Colon event brings together a group of talented individuals to create a multicolored display. Our mascot, Super Colon Hero, was awarded the 2016 American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) Scopy Award. The Scopy Award was introduced by the ACG to recognize the achievements of ACG members in community engagement, education and awareness efforts for colorectal cancer prevention.

Throughout the rest of the year, staff of Cancer Program plays a part in planning or promoting a variety of community outreach activities. Our goal is to make sure that NYHHS community outreach includes a message about the availability of cancer screening, prevention and treatment as part of the VA-NYHHS family of services.



### HEAD & NECK SCREENING & PREVENTION EVENT

The first Head and Neck Cancer Screening took place at the New York campus of VA-NYHHS on April 10, 2019 for two hours. Physicians and physician assistants were present to screen Veterans for Head and Neck cancer and a total of 57 Veterans were screened within a two-hour period and 6 referrals made to our ENT service. The outreach event had two sections, one for education and prevention strategies on oral-head and neck cancers in the lobby with light refreshments served and one for screening by ENT physicians for interested Veterans. Veterans that completed the screening, were able to participate to receive a surprise gift to promote good oral hygiene.



### BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

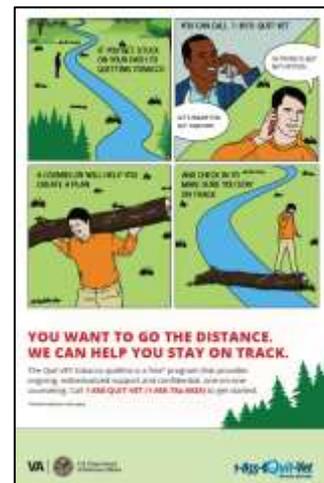
In October 2019, VA-NYHHS held a Breast Cancer Awareness Event to encourage our Veterans to get screened for breast cancer and live a healthy, active lifestyle.



## PREVENTION: GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT November 2019

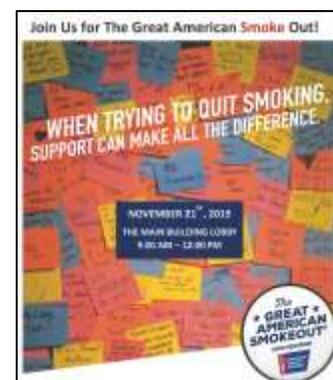
More than 34 million Americans still smoke cigarettes and smoking remains the single largest preventable cause of death and illness in the world. Smoking causes an estimated 480,000 deaths every year, or about 1 in 5 deaths. And more than 16 million Americans live with a smoking-related disease. While the cigarette smoking rate has dropped significantly, from 42% in 1965 to 14% in 2017, the gains have been inconsistent. Some groups of Americans suffer disproportionately from smoking-related cancer and other diseases, including those who have less education, who live below the poverty level, or who suffer from serious psychological distress.

The *Great American Smokeout* is a major event a VA-NYHHS. The event, held annually on the third Thursday of November, is an opportunity for smokers to commit to a healthy, smoke-free life and learn about the tools they can use to quit.



Ongoing smoking cessation activities include a drop-in clinic, weekly Smoking Cessation Support Group, Primary Care Teams counsel their patients about smoking cessation, offer referral to counselors and provide medications.

VA also has Quit VET, a national, proactive, toll-free tobacco cessation quit line. Available by phone Monday through Friday from 8 am to 8 pm, trained tobacco cessation counselors provide up to four individualized telephone counseling sessions. Services are available in both English and Spanish.



## SURVIVORSHIP

***“Patients completing primary treatment should be provided with a comprehensive care summary and follow-up plan that is clearly and effectively explained.”***

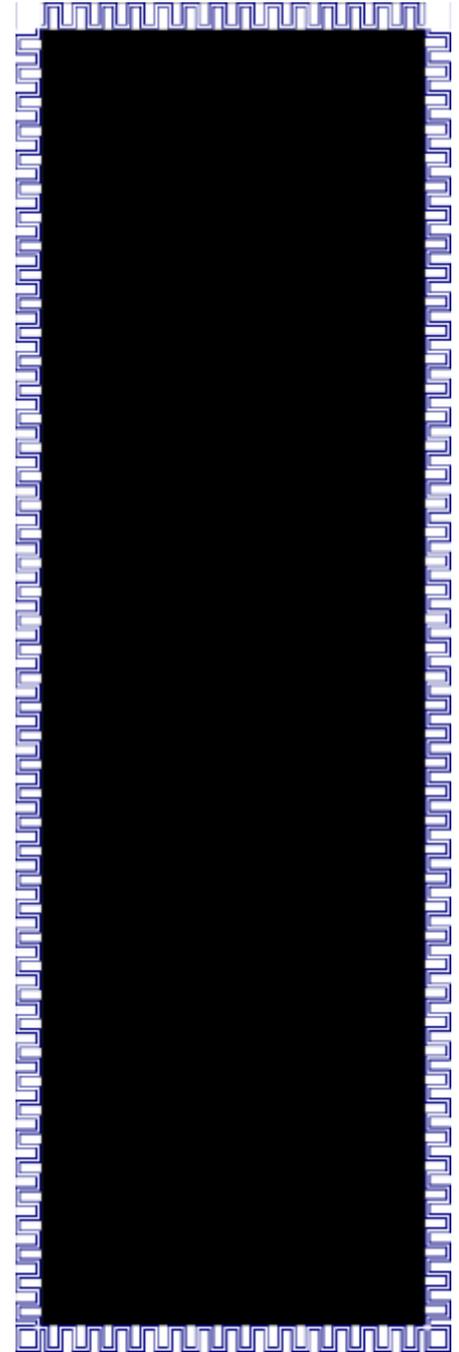
***- Cancer Patient to Cancer Survivor: Lost in Transition, Institute of Medicine, 2005***

The Institute of Medicine and National Research Council 2005 report titled *From Cancer Patient to Cancer Survivor: Lost in Transition* suggested that treatment summaries and care plans would help cancer survivors who may otherwise get lost in the transitions from the care they received during treatment through subsequent phases of their lives or stages of their disease. The purpose of this standard is to have cancer programs develop and implement a process to monitor the dissemination of a Survivorship Care Plan as a part of the standard care of the cancer patient.

The following excerpt from the American College of Surgeons (ACoS) Commission on Cancer (CoC) report on the Rapid Quality Reporting System provides the context for both the challenge and the importance of this new initiative.

*“The organization of cancer makes quality evaluation in cancer a different challenge than, for example, cardiac care. Quality initiatives in cardiac care can focus primarily on single episodes of inpatient care. Quality evaluation in cancer care cannot be limited to the inpatient setting. Cancer care is the sum of multiple episodes of care, often spread over weeks or months, administered by a number of providers across different specialties.”*

Since 2012, the Cancer Committee has been striving to meet this challenge, and we continue to do so. The Cancer Survivorship Treatment Summary and Care Plan are in the electronic medical record, allowing the document to be available not only for the patient but for all treating providers.



## SCREENING FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL DISTRESS

The Standards of the Commission on Cancer include screening patients for distress and psychosocial health needs as a critical first step to providing quality cancer care. The Institute of Medicine (IOM)'s 2007 report, *Cancer Care for the Whole Patient: Meeting Psychosocial Health Needs*, emphasized the importance of this intervention. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) states that *distress should be recognized, monitored and documented and treated promptly at all stages of the disease*. The IOM report emphasizes that cancer patients registering distress in the initial review need referrals for appropriate follow up and re-evaluation. Thus, the goal of the Cancer Committee is to develop a process to: 1) incorporate the screening of distress into the standard care of oncology patients; 2) provide patients with appropriate resources and referral for psychosocial needs.

In 2011, we adapted the National Comprehensive Cancer Network's Distress Thermometer for use in our electronic medical record and began screening new patients in the Medical Oncology clinic at the Brooklyn campus. The clinic nurse administers the psychosocial monitor and appropriate follow-up is provided by the psychologist and social worker. In 2014, we began to administer the distress screen in the Radiation Oncology Department and in Oncology at the New York campus.

In 2015, VA-NYHHS Psychology Service conducted an IRB-approved study in the Oncology outpatient clinic to measure the impact of this encounter on patients, including their receptivity to this intervention initially and to subsequent psychosocial follow-ups. The evidence indicates that the introduction of psychosocial care at an early point in medical treatment is feasible, convenient for patients and helpful in normalizing the psychosocial dimension as part of the cancer experience.

*VA -NYHHS  
Cancer Program  
is committed to  
attending to all  
needs of the  
patient:  
psychological,  
physical, medical,  
social and  
spiritual – during  
treatment and as  
a cancer survivor  
as outlined in the  
2006 Institute of  
Medicine report,  
“Lost in  
Transition”.*

## PATIENT NAVIGATION

VA-NYHHS has recently recruited its first dedicated Nurse Cancer Navigator to assist our clinicians with the timely screening, evaluation and treatment of Veterans with cancer. As per the Commission on Cancer, patient navigation in cancer care "*refers to individualized assistant offered to patients, families and caregivers to help overcome healthcare system barriers and facilitate timely access to quality medical and psychosocial care.*"

The focus of the Nurse Navigator is currently the evaluation and treatment of Veterans who have suspicious nodules on CT scan screening for lung cancer. The Nurse Navigator assists the Pulmonary, Surgery, Medical Oncology and Radiation Oncology Services at the NY and BK campuses by tracking abnormal screening examinations in a software application developed by the West Haven VA, the Cancer Care Tracking System (CCTS). The CCTS can be used to track other abnormal imaging and is also used to track abnormal mammograms to assist the Womens Health Service in monitoring, evaluation and management of these Veterans.

Since 2007, the VA-NYHHS Cancer Program has partnered with Voluntary Service to develop and manage a Navigators Program at the Brooklyn campus. Our navigators are Veterans who have experienced cancer either as a patient or as caregiver. They provide peer support to other Veterans with cancer with the goal of lessening the anxiety of receiving cancer care and providing a friendly presence in clinics and chemotherapy areas and through their presence, assisting patients as they move through the cancer treatment continuum.



## JOHN AND DARIA BARRY PRECISION ONCOLOGY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AT VA NEW YORK HARBOR HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Helping to advance revolutionary research in prostate cancer and delivery of precision treatments to U.S. Veterans, the John and Daria Barry Foundation has donated \$2.5 million to the Prostate Cancer Foundation (PCF) to establish the John and Daria Barry Precision Oncology Center of Excellence at the Manhattan Campus of the VA NY Harbor Healthcare System (VANYHHS). The Barry Center of Excellence will address the clinical needs of Veterans currently battling prostate cancer in the New York metropolitan area and beyond. The Barry Center of Excellence will also serve as a precision oncology hub in the PCF's preeminent network of centers executing the ambitious mission of improving the care of U.S. Veterans with prostate cancer. Due to the cancer-causing mutations in prostate cancer that may be found in different types of cancer, this investment will have implications for many other forms of life-threatening cancer. "The establishment of this new Center of Excellence will enhance precision delivery of advanced cancer treatments to our nation's Veterans, who have sacrificed so much to protect us, our values and our freedoms," said Elizabeth Barry Swanson, executive for the John and Daria Barry Foundation. "Focusing on advanced cancer treatments and cures for Veterans leads to better cancer treatment and cures for everyone, an initiative the Barry Foundation is dedicated to supporting."



