

# Providing Cutting-Edge Cancer Care Locally

Bristol Hospital's Cancer Care Center Affiliates with Yale-New Haven Cancer Network

By Katherine L. Kraines

When Bristol Hospital's new Cancer Care Center opened on November 19, 2007, it signaled a new era in the accessibility, scope and quality of cancer care provided to the local community. The new center is the result of the collaborative vision of Kurt Barwis, President and CEO of Bristol Hospital, FACHE, CPA, and the hospital's medical staff and leadership team. "We are committed to excellence in all that we do," Barwis emphasized. "To fulfill this goal, we are dedicated to bringing the best possible cancer care locally to the community we serve."

The new cancer center is part of a three-pronged approach established and initiated less than a year ago by Barwis and the hospital's leadership team. "We set a very ambitious goal," Barwis explained. "We decided that we were going to open a new cancer care center, knowing that bricks and mortar don't make a program. You can have a beautiful center, but it can be hollow if the quality of and access to the infrastructure is not there. Our approach was to simultaneously complete the building, establish an affiliation partner for cancer care with a new understanding of what we were going to accomplish and hire a medical director."

## THE PROCESS

What patients see and experience at the new cancer center is the result of extensive planning and collaboration. Barwis feels that an effective change process is based on the idea that "a hospital is truly a community, and that quality is driven by cooperation and consensus building within that community." With this goal in mind, Barwis invited the entire medical staff to a day-long summit to discuss how to move the hospital's cancer program forward. "It was very exciting and we had great participation," he observed. "People came on their day off and got involved for the right reasons; they really cared."

The summit addressed a series of questions, resulting in consensus on the following points:

- That 85-90% of cancer care can and should be delivered in the local community setting;
- The cancer program must include the availability of cancer research protocols to patients;
- The physicians staffing the medical oncology unit should be based in and have an attachment to the Bristol community;

- That partnering for cancer care was vital to ensuring access to cancer protocols and to delivering the best cancer care locally;
- The 10-15% of patients that cannot be treated locally must have seamless access to the next level of care; and
- That a medical director should be hired to oversee all aspects of the cancer program.

Following the summit, a group of about 12 physicians, the medical staff cancer leadership group, began meeting informally to ensure that the points agreed upon maintained momentum. They concluded that the affiliation partner for cancer care must meet several important criteria: that cancer protocols and clinical trials would be available to Bristol Hospital patients; the cancer program would receive help with outreach and educational programs; support would be provided to the local medical staff; and that there would be a strong link for patients who couldn't be treated locally. Focusing on these points, the leadership team sent out a request for proposal.

# AN AFFILIATION PARTNER

After discussions with several possible partners, talks began with representatives of the Yale-New Haven Health System. "In our discussions with Yale-New Haven, it was obvious that they were as interested as we were in forging this relationship," noted Barwis. "As we started talking more seriously, almost every criteria our medical staff had established was acceptable to Yale-New Haven. So, there was not only interest, but a willingness to understand that we were well defined in how we expected this part of the relationship to work. It was very clear that there was great synergy with Yale-New Haven's leadership." One of Yale-New Haven's stipulations was the agreement that Bristol Hospital would provide the quality of care consistently associated with Yale-New Haven.

On October 1, Bristol Hospital announced a formal affiliation agreement for cancer services with the Yale-New Haven Health System Network, which includes Yale-New Haven Hospital, Yale Cancer Center and the Yale School of Medicine. The affiliation provides Bristol Hospital physicians and clinical staff with information on the latest clinical treatments and research; access to clinical resources, cancer protocols and clinical trials; and the opportunity to network with Yale-New Haven Hospital and Yale Cancer Center specialists

in medical oncology, surgical oncology, oncology nursing and other allied-health professions. Yale-New Haven physicians will come to Bristol Hospital to provide care in their disease specialties and Bristol Hospital cancer patients will have access to Yale Cancer Center's programs and resources, including network clinical trials.

# MEDICAL DIRECTOR

Concurrent with the affiliation process, the leadership team began the search for a new medical director. "As discussions evolved with Yale-New Haven, they offered to do a full interview of our medical director candidates to ensure good collaboration, connection and the availability of research protocols at Bristol Hospital," noted Barwis. The process culminated in the hiring of Dr. David Dobrzanski, who was raised in Connecticut, as the new Medical Director at Bristol Hospital, effective January 1. He will have service responsibility for cancer care, education and outreach in the hospital and in the community.

Trained at the National Cancer Institute, Dr. Dobrzanski has extensive experience in developing different types of cancer centers, including those in academic, rural, city and community settings. "I enjoy building and bringing cancer centers to the next level of cancer

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care," he commented. "My vision is to direct a comprehensive cancer center of excellence for the Bristol area community. One key goal is to provide high-quality cancer care along with technology from Yale-New Haven. I have a number of different models in mind for structuring the cancer center, and I will have the opportunity to use the best fit model for the community at Bristol Hospital."

Dr. Dobrzanski feels that patients must have access to cancer center physicians and clinical staff, including nurses, social workers, dieticians and other support staff. "It is very important to have great patient communication and for patients to have access to a variety of services in the cancer center," he explained. "This helps in the treatment of patients and aids in catching patient problems when they are small and easier to solve. Patient care is greatly improved by having strong relationships and interactions with patients, on many different levels, in the cancer center."

### TRANSITIONING PATIENTS

Bristol Hospital is committed to helping patients make a smooth transition from being treated by physicians from St. Francis Hospital, Bristol Hospital's previous partner in cancer care, to being treated by

> physicians from Yale-New Haven. Reflecting on this process, Barwis shared insights from a conversation with a woman who had received long-term cancer treatment at Bristol Hospital but was unaware that her physician was leaving. "She asked me what was going on, and I explained to her the journey we were on," Barwis said. "She told me she didn't care about that and that I needed to understand that she had been fighting this battle for five years. What mattered was that her hope, belief and confidence were in the hands of a physician who was leaving. She didn't understand why this was being taken from her and she needed to know what her options were.

> "This was an incredible reality. We thought we had done a good job of informing patients," Barwis observed. "But this made us realize that we needed to think differently about how to do this. We had provided notice in the unit, but we clearly hadn't met everybody's needs. So, we provided better notice and reached out to all the patients. We also held a reception so that patients could meet and get to know the physicians from Yale-New Haven." Barwis concluded that "you try to proactively think things through, but the patients always bring you back to center. I am very grateful that this patient took the time to talk with me."

# YALE-NEW HAVEN CANCER NETWORK

Yale Cancer Center is one of 41 National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer centers in the U.S. and the only one in Connecticut. The affiliation with Bristol Hospital helps Yale Cancer Center to fulfill its mission of reaching out and developing relationships with community partners. "Our goal," explained Dr. Edward Chu, professor of medicine and pharmacology, Chief of the Section of Medical Oncology and Deputy Director of the Yale Cancer Center, "is to improve the general day-to-day clinical care of cancer patients, and to try and develop and offer program initiatives in prevention, early detection, screening and new therapies. Community outreach expands our opportunities to develop clinical trials, initially therapeutic trials, across a wide range of different areas and to offer them to local communities." Dr. Chu said that the partnership will provide Yale-New Haven with a model

for developing future relationships with other community programs throughout Connecticut.

Bristol Hospital cancer patients and physicians will have access to Yale-New Haven's oncology specialists: physicians with an indepth understanding of the disease type and process, and different treatment options and strategies. "We will have medical oncologists from Yale Cancer Center at Bristol Hospital, but patients and physicians can also access the expertise of the multidisciplinary team for each different disease," said Dr. Chu. "For adult patients, there are 11 multidisciplinary teams that encompass medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, surgical oncologists, radiologists and pathologists. These teams provide a tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience."

According to Dr. Chu, approximately eight faculty members will visit Bristol Hospital on a regular basis. Yale-New Haven is also planning to have an oncologist in the new cancer center three or four days a week. "Our breast cancer group will be there," noted Dr. Chu. "And we have identified a GI specialist, lung cancer specialist and a generalist who will spend time at the hospital. My specialty is GI and colorectal cancer, and I will also be there to make sure everything goes as smoothly as possible and to communicate that this affiliation is very important."

Bristol Hospital employees and medical staff will have access to educational programs, and best-practice clinical pathways and protocols. Yale School of Medicine specialists will conduct grand rounds on select topics at Bristol Hospital. Further, Bristol Hospital medical staff will be able to participate in Yale-New Haven's tumor boards in person or via teleconference, and will be able to present cancer



The new Bristol Hospital Cancer Care Center has been designed to embody elements and features that will contribute to and enhance a patient's treatment experience by creating a "healing environment."

cases concurrently via teleconference to any of Yale-New Haven's 11 tumor boards.

Dr. Kenneth Miller, the Director of the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship program at the Yale Cancer Center, will see a variety of tumor types, and he will establish a satellite cancer survivorship program at Bristol Hospital. The affiliation provides all Bristol Hospital cancer patients, with a cancer-related issue, access to programs at the Yale Cancer Center and Yale-New Haven Hospital, including access to the new Yale Cancer Hospital once it is completed.

### THE NEW CANCER CARE CENTER

Bristol Hospital serves about 75,000 households in the communities of Bristol, Burlington, Plainville, Southington and Wolcott. The Cancer Care Center has easy access and parking, private treatment rooms, a conference room, sunlit treatment and waiting areas equipped with wireless Internet, flat-screen televisions and individual sound systems. There is a soothing water feature in the waiting area and an outdoor garden for contemplation. The center is designed to enhance care in a supportive and pleasant healing environment. Bristol Hospital's Cancer Care Center is dedicated to providing the best cancer care locally, so that patients and their families do not have to travel long distances to receive cutting-edge cancer treatment. "Hospitals like Bristol Hospital are not-for-profit," commented Barwis. "We are literally owned by the community, and our mission is to take care of this community."

For more information regarding the Bristol Hospital Cancer Care Center, please call (860) 585-3400. ■