In partnership with Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, UW Medicine's goal is to transform the standard of oncology care to ensure that every cancer patient and their family gets the emotional and psychological support they need and deserve. Over 14 million people in the United States are living with a cancer diagnosis. With survival from cancer continuing to improve, attention must turn to improving not just the length of life, but also the quality of life of cancer survivors. Emotional and psychological distress is experienced by nearly half of all people with cancer, negatively affecting their recovery and ability to tolerate treatment. Research shows that the majority of patients do not receive adequate care for these issues. We strive to improve patients' lives by providing the most effective and accessible psychosocial cancer care.

Treating Mind and Body

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How You Can Help

To learn how you can accelerate our Psychosocial Oncology Care efforts forward, please contact Cassidy Gammill, assistant director for philanthropy (206.221.0635; cgammill@uw.edu). We look forward to your partnership!

Transforming Cancer Care

Oncology and Mental Health

uwpsychiatry.org
Patient Story: Ruth Kaminski

Ruth Kaminski’s diagnosis with invasive ductal carcinoma caught her completely off guard. At first, she was scared and shocked, trying to figure out what to do next. “There is no road map for cancer,” she says. As her treatment progressed, she spiraled into depression.

She was constantly keeping up a brave front for her family and friends, and it began to weigh on her. “I was the clown, laughing and joking with everyone at my treatments and appointments, but crying in the shower every morning.”

When she found the Integrated Psychosocial Oncology Program at Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, it turned everything around. “It was so freeing to be myself with someone who got it,” says Ruth. Dr. Fann helped her work through the complex emotions that she had been covering up since her diagnosis.

Ruth believes that a mental health specialist should be part of every cancer patient’s initial care team. “Cancer patients should have mental health treatment before they even know they need it.”

Current Successes

At UW Medicine and Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, we have developed a new approach to psychosocial care designed to ensure no patient falls between the cracks. The Integrated Psychosocial Oncology Program is a collaboration among Psychiatry, Psychology, and Social Work that provides comprehensive support, education, and evidence-based treatment for the full spectrum of emotional and psychological issues that arise during cancer treatment and surveillance. This program serves patients at Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, which brings together the leading research teams and cancer specialists of Fred Hutch, Seattle Children’s, and UW Medicine.

The program is on-site and integrated into the patient’s routine cancer care, increasing convenience for cancer patients. Additionally, it builds on the patient’s existing relationships with their medical team, facilitates close collaboration with the patient’s primary care providers, and improves health outcomes.

The program uses the Collaborative Care model developed at UW to provide the most holistic, compassionate care possible. Team members, including a care manager and mental health specialist, are fully integrated into the primary oncology teams, maximizing efficiency and convenience for the patient and their family. We offer a wide range of treatment options, which are carefully tailored to the specific needs of each patient. The team meets on a weekly basis to share ideas, review clinical outcomes, and ensure that care is effective and well-coordinated for each patient across all facets of their care.

Future Directions

The Integrated Psychosocial Oncology Program at Seattle Cancer Care Alliance has proven we can significantly enhance access to effective psychosocial care. Now, we need effective adaptations and enhancements to meet the needs of the growing number of cancer patients regionally, nationally, and globally.

INCREASING ACCESS WITH TELERADIOLOGY

Providing access to mental health care is a crucial piece of the puzzle for patients with cancer, as is flexible treatment strategies tailored to meet the specific needs of individuals, families and caregivers. We seek funds to study the use of mobile and video teleconferencing technologies to allow healthcare providers and patients in rural and remote areas to consult with experts in psychosocial oncology at UW Medicine and Seattle Cancer Care Alliance.

IMPROVING COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING DURING CANCER TREATMENT

Many cancer patients experience disabling cognitive problems from their chemotherapy or from medications that are prescribed to lessen treatment side effects. These problems can range from impaired concentration and memory to profound confusion. We seek funds to identify the risk factors for developing cognitive problems during cancer treatment, to craft preventive strategies to keep cognitive problems from developing, and to find innovative ways to reverse them when they occur.

HELPING FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Caring for someone with cancer can be extremely stressful, often leading to significant anxiety, depression, fatigue, work stress and other health and social problems. Evidence suggests that early interventions to support family members and other caregivers can significantly benefit both caregiver and patient. We seek funds to develop new resources that provide support for caregivers and to further research in this important area.