

NEW CENTER LOCALIZES CANCER TREATMENT

KNIGHT CANCER COLLABORATIVE IS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND ■ Edward Stratton

After more than seven years of preparation, Columbia Memorial Hospital and Oregon Health & Science University's Knight Cancer Institute have opened the Knight Cancer Collaborative, expanding chemotherapy and providing the region's cancer patients with the first local source of radiation therapy.

"This has been the biggest community-supported project I've seen in my career here at CMH," said Erik Thorsen, CEO of the hospital, in a news release about the cancer center's opening. "The fundraising efforts and community partnerships have been remarkable."

Expanding cancer care

In 2010, OHSU had no presence in Clatsop County. The hospital and Dr. Sangkun "Sonny" Park's office across Exchange Street were often competing, rather than working with one another.

When he was thinking of establishing a cancer center, Park went around to others in the region. "Nobody took any consideration of building a cancer center here," Park said of Astoria.

But Mark O'Halloran, director of clinical outreach at OHSU, offered to come out. A partnership eventually formed between the hospital and OHSU that led to the region's first chemotherapy center inside the CMH Health & Wellness Pavilion and later the Park Medical Building, serving an estimated 300 patients per month.

But locals were forced to drive to the Portland metro area and Longview, Washington, to receive radiation therapy. A course of radiation therapy is generally administered for five consecutive days and can last up to eight weeks.

Collaborations

The cancer center sits on top of the former John Warren Field, the former home field of Astoria High School's Fighting Fishermen. The hospital, next door, had been looking to acquire the field for decades.

In 2012, the hospital, city of Astoria and Astoria School District announced a partnership to help each other. The city had a former landfill on Williamsport Road that needed capping to prevent toxic leakage into surrounding groundwater, and a source of tax-exempt bond financing for nonprofits through the Hospital Facilities Authority.

The hospital took out \$31 million worth of revenue bonds later that year, most of it to refinance debt, along with approximately \$5 million to build a new sports complex for the school district. By the end of 2014, with the sports complex finished, the Astoria School Board voted to sign over John Warren Field to the hospital.

The hospital and OHSU first announced the Knight Cancer Collaborative, the first of its kind, in 2015, after two years of silent fundraising had gathered \$1.3 million. A capital campaign would eventually collect around \$3 million.



Lounging chairs for chemotherapy infusions: one of the features of the new Knight Cancer Collaborative is a treatment area with expansive views of the Columbia River and Astoria riverfront. — COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

The hospital was aided again by the city's Hospital Facilities Authority, selling \$18.8 million worth of revenue bonds to finance the cancer center and renovate its emergency department.

Construction broke ground in August 2016, led by general contractor P&C Construction. The firm worked on past hospital projects such as the CMH Health & Wellness Pavilion and Astoria Sports Complex, along with Clatsop Community College's main campus redevelopment.

High-tech treatment

At the core of the new \$16 million cancer center is the Versa HD, a linear particle accelerator that delivers customized, high-energy beams of radiation to kill tumor cells. The accelerator includes 160 metal leaves that move to conform the shape of the beam to the contours of a patient's tumor. A specialized, moving couch lifts and turns patients during treatment.

A new bank of lounging chairs for chemotherapy infusions overlooks the Columbia River to the north.

To support patients going through treatment, the center provides financial advisers; support groups and counselors; beauticians to help with cosmetics, shaving and hair care; a yoga instructor; a massage therapist, acupuncturist and naturopath to address the side effects of treatment; and a patient resource center for wigs, prosthetics and other products.

In all, the hospital expects to see 3,000 visits a year for chemotherapy treatment and 1,800 radiation treatments within a year of operation.

"Our collaboration with the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute is a significant enhancement to the health care services available to our community," Thorsen said. "We are working to bridge the divide of accessible health care services locally. Our growing partnership with OHSU aims to continue bringing medical advancements to the North Coast."