

Comprehensive cancer care ... in your home community

BY RENEE SKOGLUND
STAFF WRITER



John LaLonde of Westland has chemotherapy administered by Linda MacDonald, a nurse at St. Mary Mercy's new cancer center. John's wife, Rose, sits by his side.

PHOTO BY ST. MARY MERCY HOSPITAL

Rx
briefs

Valentine message

Celebrate Valentine's Day with a "Massage for Couples" and learn massage techniques together. Offered by Botsford Center for Health Improvement, this two-hour class can positively affect your sweetheart's health and well-being. Massages are scheduled by appointment. The cost is \$200.

Instructor Diane Grimm, a certified massage therapist and Reiki practitioner, will teach couples how to relieve stress, tension, sore muscles, headaches, backaches and more. Besides feeling good, massage provides many physical and psychological benefits.

To register, call (248) 477-6000 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Botsford Center for Health Improvement is located at 39750 Grand River Ave., between Haggerty and Meadowbrook in Novi.

Kids Yoga

Put down that Sunday paper! It's not too late to sign up your children for "Kids Yoga," a class taught by Jennifer Barrett, a senior Bikram yoga instructor who is certified to teach children. The six-week class starts today, Feb. 2, from 12:30-1:15 p.m. However, the class is not full and walk-ins are welcome. Even if you miss the first class, you may still register.

The class is held at the Bikram Yoga Center, 28857 Orchard Lake, between 12 Mile and 13 Mile, Farmington Hills. The cost is \$55 for a six-week session. To register, call Melissa at (248) 489-9923 or e-mail: Melissa@bikramyogadetroit.com.

(For those acquainted with Bikram yoga, please note that the room will not be overly heated for the children.)

Cancer survival

Cancer support groups can make patients feel better, but they don't improve mortality rates, finds a new study presented at a recent meeting of the European Society of Medical Oncology in France. After analyzing 11 studies that included about 1,500 cancer patients, English researchers concluded that the data "provided no evidence at all to show that psychosocial support groups prolong life in cancer patients."

However, the study's lead author says he continues to recommend that patients involve themselves in support groups as part of their therapy because counseling can help them "cope with their disease." In addition, he comments that the power of psychological support to improve patients' quality of life should "not be underestimated."

Red Cross

Become a Red Cross volunteer. Why not? The American Red Cross, led by volunteers, is the largest humanitarian organization in the United States. It provides relief to victims of disaster and helps people prevent, prepare for and recover from emergencies, both domestic and international. All assistance is free.

Volunteer opportunities exist in all areas. Call Shari Cunningham at (313) 578-4921 or log onto www.servevolunteers.org. Together, the Red Cross and you can save a life.

John and Rose LaLonde of Westland don't like driving expressways, so getting cancer care for John at St. Mary Mercy Hospital's Cancer Center in Livonia has been a real convenience.

"When our kids had to take us to Henry Ford Hospital that was an inconvenience because they had to get out of work. Now it just takes us 10 minutes to get here," said Rose.

John, 72, who was diagnosed with leukemia last year, also appreciates the short drive back home after treatments, which can take several hours. A long drive would simply add to his exhaustion.

"I think it's marvelous," he said about the center. "It's great, and the help should be commended."

The oncology staff and hospital administrators at St. Mary Mercy are bursting with pride over the fledgling center, which opened last year.

Visually defined from the rest of the hospital by an entranceway of gleaming two-toned hardwood floors, the 2,700-square-foot center contains three examination rooms, an infusion room, and a resource center with Internet access that can double as a family meeting place.

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And this is just the beginning. When medical oncologist Dr. Harnesh Naik, one of the center's visionaries, looks five years into the future, he sees a free-standing building housing a multi-disciplinary cancer center. He sees patients meeting with their medical team — surgeons, medical oncologists and radiation oncologists — within the same day. He also envisions physicians coming to the clinic to see a patient in a series of successive appointments, joint meetings with other doctors, and a concluding informational meeting with family members.

"We had everything here, but those services were not integrated, not user friendly," he said of past practices in cancer care. There are approximately 50 specialists in the hospital's Marion Building, he added.

Service and convenience are bonuses, but most important is quality of treatment. Cancer patients can expect the same high-quality treatment available at larger centers, such as the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center or Karmanos Cancer Institute, said Naik, who was associated with Karmanos until joining St. Mary Mercy in 1997.

University hospitals have a different mandate to do research and cutting edge therapy, said Naik.

"Each type of hospital has a different role to play. Yes, we are a small hospital, but we're using it to our advantage. Here I can call the chief of radiology and say any patient can't wait for a CAT scan. Also, change can be implemented quicker in a smaller organization. You come to St. Mary Mercy and the care is second to none," he said, adding that there is competition among hospitals. "We are measured by the same yardstick as any other hospital... We don't do the 2 percent patients, but for the rest, we will assure them our care is second to none."

St. Mary Mercy Hospital is the only community hospital in Wayne County accredited by the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons, said Naik.

STANDARDS

When it comes to cancer treatment, it's all about standards of care, said



Medical oncologist Dr. Harnesh Naik has long-range plans for the St. Mary Mercy Cancer Center, which opened last December.

Sarah Gilbert, director of Cancer Services at St. Mary Mercy: Such standards are universal.

"In terms of standards of care, treatment can be done at a local level," she said. It's levels of research that differentiate a local cancer center from metropolitan centers like University of

Michigan and Karmanos, she added.

But local doesn't exclude consulting physicians at the bigger cancer centers, Gilbert stressed. "If you're diagnosed at St. Mary Mercy, you can still go for a second opinion at the University of Michigan. And the opposite is true. We want you to get a second opinion."

Major cancer centers work hard to define standards of care, said Dr. Max Wicha, director of the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center. Centers like U-M and Karmanos belong to the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, which host panels to define state-of-the-art treatments. Members of the NCCN meet every two to three months.

Major cancer centers benefit community cancer centers in two ways, said Wicha: First, they develop the standards of care based on cutting-edge research and application of new treatments. Research and treatments that look promising in the initial stage are shared with community centers. Second, cases that are not standard can be referred to a major cancer center. Major centers have specialized experts in breast, colon and prostate cancers, for example, as opposed to cancer generalists, who usually staff community cancer centers.

Working in partnership with a community cancer center, we can provide an expert in a particular cancer and come up with a recommendation for treatment, then send the patient back to the community center," said Wicha.

CONVENIENCE

The convenience of being treated within your own community cannot be discounted, said Wicha.

"Not having to travel away from fam-



Wicha

ly and community is important, especially for the very ill who need frequent therapy. And if there are complications, it's very reassuring to know you can meet quickly with your doctors and nurses," he said.

In addition, community cancer centers play a strong role in the fight against cancer by offering early cancer detection programs, Wicha added.

The first phase of St. Mary Mercy's cancer center, mostly cosmetic remodeling changes, cost approximately \$200,000. The cost of the second phase — Naik's vision — has not been established.

"The cancer center will be funded through community donations and internal support of physicians, management and other hospital supporters," said David Spivey, president and CEO. "The community is showing considerable interest and support for a cancer center to be available close to home."

Meanwhile, the new "phase 1" center is going ahead with plans to make it as comprehensive as possible.

"We're planning to establish specific clinic days for lung cancer and prostate cancer patients. The implementation phase will start within the next few months," said Gilbert.

LaLonde is pleased that others in his community will receive the kind of care he's getting at the St. Mary Mercy Cancer Center.

"I'd recommend it to anyone, highly," he said.

For more information on the St. Mary Mercy Cancer Center, call (734) 655-8800.

Early-warning procedure can help more melanoma patients

ANN ARBOR — Patients who develop melanoma on their face, head or neck can have the same early-diagnosis surgical procedure to see if their cancer might spread as patients whose cancer is on less delicate areas of the body, a new study finds.

The report, from a team at the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center, opens the door for many more melanoma patients to benefit from a potentially life-saving technique called sentinel lymph node mapping. The results will be published in the *Archives of Otolaryngology, a Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Many hospitals already use sentinel lymph node mapping to assess the threat of melanoma in patients with lesions on their arms, trunk or legs. The technique

shows whether cancer cells have entered nearby lymph nodes and might spread further, and helps doctors and patients decide how aggressive treatment should be.

But fear of damaging the delicate nerves and blood vessels concentrated in the head and neck has kept many physicians from using the technique on patients with cancer on their scalp, face or neck — nearly one-fifth of the 87,900 melanoma patients diagnosed each year. As a result, many may be receiving inadequate treatment.

The new results, from 50 patients treated through the U-M's noted melanoma program and followed for at least a year after mapping, show that the technique can be performed safely and yield the same information in these

patients as in others.

More than 96 percent of patients were successfully mapped, and 18 percent were shown to have melanoma that had spread to a lymph node — giving them a diagnosis much sooner than a standard routine examination would have. The false-negative rate was 4.5 percent.

"These results clearly show that patients with melanoma of the head and neck can be accurately staged through sentinel lymph node mapping, allowing very early detection of even minimal disease in the lymph nodes," says author Dr. Carol Bradford, who directs the U-M Head and Neck Oncology Program. "Although the technique is the most challenging in these patients, we now know it can be done, and done safely."

The authors hope the technique will

become standard for all appropriate melanoma patients. But they caution that to be accurate, the procedure requires a great deal of experience and expertise on the part of the team of surgeons, nuclear medicine specialists and pathologists required to carry it out.

LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

The technique focuses on the lymphatic system, an interlinked network of vessels, ducts, nodes and glands that carries disease-fighting immune system components throughout the body.

But the lymphatic system can also act as a highway for melanoma cells, giving them a direct route from the original skin