



# Northeast Georgia Medical Center

CANCER SERVICES

## 2017 Annual Report



A QUALITY PROGRAM  
OF THE AMERICAN  
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS



## Administrative Report

Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) is pleased to present our 2017 Cancer Annual Report which outlines some of our program activities and accomplishments for the last year.

While we've had the opportunity to host several valuable community education events and screenings this year, our greatest accomplishment, by far, came when CareChex ranked NGMC among the top 9% of hospital cancer programs in the nation. NGMC's Cancer Services program received this ranking from the independent health-care ratings organization based on several measures including quality of medical care, treatment outcomes and patient satisfaction.

Additionally, NGMC offers research-based cancer care and nationally approved treatment planning, giving our patients the opportunity to stay local for their treatment and close to their family and support systems.

Another reason I believe patients choose NGMC is the deep-rooted commitment and personalized care they receive from our physicians and staff. This means our patients have access to advanced cancer care provided by specialists who are as skilled at treating the person as they are at treating the disease.

But, as with many things in life, the difference between a good program and a great program is the desire to continually improve. NGMC has made improvements on both the technology and accessibility sides this year. First, we added High Dose Rate (HDR) Brachytherapy in Braselton and, in October, we expanded our Oncology Nurse Navigation program with the addition of a new nurse navigator, Sandi Clark, who now provides navigation services for the Braselton and Barrow communities.

In addition, our lung cancer screening program, which utilizes low-dose CT scans, continues to be successful in helping us catch lung cancers earlier, when treatment is most successful. In fact, in just a year and a half, our program has screened almost 600 patients!

It's truly been an exciting year for us, and we look forward to what the future brings for our patients, community and collaborating physicians.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayme Carrico". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jayme" being more prominent than the last name "Carrico".

Jayme Carrico, MBA  
Executive Director, Oncology Services at NGMC

## **2017 Cancer Committee Members:**

Cancer Committee Chairman: Andre Kallab, MD

Cancer Liason Physician: Craig Baden, MD

Diagnostic Radiologist: Scott Stephen, MD; Julie Presley, MD (alternate)

Medical Oncologist: Charles Nash, MD

Pathologist: Ezra Ellis, MD

Radiation Oncologist: Frank Lake, MD; Jack Griffeth, MD (alternate)

Surgeon: Ken Dixon, MD

Cancer Conference Coordinator: Saloni Tanna, MD

Cancer Research Quality Coordinator: Ezra Ellis, MD

Clinical Research Coordinator: Andre Kallab, MD

Quality Improvement Coordinator: Christina Saurel, MD

Cancer Program Administrator: Jayme Carrico, MBA

Community Outreach Coordinator: Angie Caton, BSN, RN, OCN, CHPN

Case Manager Representative: Lynn Bales, RN

Certified Tumor Registrar: Dianne Kosmala, BA, CTR

Clinical Research Representative: Trena Davis, BSN, RN, CCRC, CMS

Oncology Nurse Representative: Lori Allison, BSN, RN; Melissa Elliot, RN (alternate)

Oncology Outpatient Infusion Manager: Kim Tyner-Meeks, RN, OCN, CMS

Palliative Care Team Member: Zameer Gill, MD; Ashley Deringer, ANP-BC, ACHPN (alternate)

Performance Improvement Representative: Nancy Linto, RN; Bridgette Schultz, JD, BSN, RN (alternate)

Psychosocial Services Coordinator: Trisha Ziem, LCSW

American Cancer Society Representative: Jennifer Roberts, BSW

Hospice: Pamela Allen, Von Stephens

Nutritional Specialist: Deb Walls, RD; Kelsey Higgins, RD (alternate)

Pastoral Care: Jeff Thompson

Pharmacist: Melissa Frank, PharmD

Radiation Physics Chief: Randall P. Miller, MSc, MCCPM, FCCPM, ABMP

Rehabilitation Representative: Heather Wilsey, PT, DPT, NCS

Regional Network Development: Vicki Miller

Community Health Improvement: Christy Moore

Public Relations: Kristin Grace



## Cancer Care in 2017

**Charles Nash III, MD**

The Longstreet Clinic, P.C. – Department of Medical Oncology & Hematology  
Medical Director, Cancer Services at NGMC

Northeast Georgia Medical Center's (NGMC) Cancer Services continued its trend of steady growth again in 2017. The number of new cancer patients that were diagnosed or received their first course of treatment at NGMC also increased, reaching above 2,000 patients this year.

With this growth comes the need to expand our reach within the ever-expanding region, providing better accessibility and services closer to home for our patients. In January, NGMC added a third hospital campus – NGMC Barrow – allowing us to expand our reach and better serve the Barrow community with additional services, including cancer treatment.

To help support our cancer patients throughout our growing service area, NGMC's Cancer Services expanded its Oncology Nurse Navigation program by adding a new nurse navigator, Sandi Clark, BSN, RN, dedicated to the Braselton and Barrow areas. In addition, NGMC's telemedicine capability helps connect our network of cancer physicians and specialists together, allowing for better collaboration and treatment planning across all campuses.

Genetic testing, counseling and treatment for cancer has also become a rapidly evolving area of interest. NGMC is poised to meet this challenge, providing both expert consultation and therapy services. NGMC is also an active participant in clinical research, collaborating with other major universities and private medical centers to provide our patients access to national clinical trials.

Accredited by the American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer as a Comprehensive Community Cancer Program, NGMC provides patients with a multidisciplinary approach to cancer care, including a patient-centered focus and treatment planning using evidence-based national guidelines.

Our program continues to serve the expanding north Georgia area with high quality and compassionate cancer care. We look forward to meeting the challenges of the coming year with great anticipation.





## **Standardizing Molecular Testing in Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer**

**Christina Saurel, MD**

Northeast Georgia Diagnostic Clinic – Department of Oncology & Hematology

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related death in the U.S. Of the 222,500 newly diagnosed lung cancers each year, more than 80 percent are classified as non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). There are several subtypes of NSCLC, but they are grouped together because the approach to treatment and prognosis are often similar. NSCLC is usually not identified until the patient experiences symptoms, which can lead to a later diagnosis of an advanced stage cancer.

Traditionally, the treatment of advanced NSCLC has been platinum-based chemotherapy. However, this treatment method has shown only modest improvements for these patients, demonstrating the need for alternative treatments. Recent research supports targeted therapy, including immunotherapy, as a more effective and tolerable treatment option for NSCLC patients. This shift in treatment has led to improved survival and quality of life for those affected.

### **Targeted Therapy**

Much progress has been made over the last decade to help understand what drives cancer formation in NSCLC, including the identification of driver mutations, which give cancer cells a selective growth advantage, and the development of agents that target these molecular pathways. Conventional chemotherapy has a goal of killing cells that are growing and dividing. However, it does not discriminate against the body's healthy cells and can lead to many common side effects including hair loss, nausea and immune suppression.

With the development and use of targeted therapies, which focus on malignant cancer cells, patients have experienced less side effects and improved treatment results. Many of these therapies can be administered orally, allowing for easier administration and improved quality of life.

### **Immunotherapy**

Immunotherapy is a form of targeted cancer therapy that stimulates a person's own immune response to recognize and destroy cancer cells. An important part of the immune system is its inherent ability to keep itself from attacking normal cells in the body. To accomplish this, the immune system's cells have "checkpoints," or molecules, that act as an on/off switch for the body's immune response. Unfortunately, sometimes cancer cells use these checkpoints to evade the immune system's recognition and attacks. Immunotherapy utilizes treatment agents, or drugs, to block identified proteins, thus enhancing the body's immune response against the cancer cells.

Immunotherapy in NSCLC leads to improved response rates and more durable responses, especially in patients whose tumor demonstrates a high amount of the identified protein. Immunotherapy typically has very limited side effects, making the treatment both tolerable and beneficial to patients who are often debilitated by the disease.

## Standardizing Care

With the rapidly increasing number of available targeted therapy options comes the responsibility to ensure that: 1) the right testing is performed both consistently and in a timely manner and 2) prescribed therapy follows the most up-to-date data, including order of treatment. To address this issue, Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) has developed guidelines, supported by the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), to standardize molecular testing and treatment in our NSCLC population.

Previously, testing was ordered at the time of the patient's initial medical oncologist visit, which often occurred weeks after the tissue biopsy. Because the typical turnaround time for these biopsies is 14 days, patients lose valuable time between the time of their consultation and the beginning of their treatment plan.

By implementing guidelines requiring molecular testing to be ordered at the time of tissue biopsy, we can help limit treatment delays and improve the delivery of care. Additionally, proper sequencing of treatment therapies helps improve patient outcomes, as well as quality of life, by using the most effective treatment option first.

We are hopeful that these guidelines will help standardize care and ensure all NSCLC patients in our community receive the national standard of care each time.





## **Clinical Research at Northeast Georgia Medical Center**

**Mindy Muenich**

Interim Director, Department of Research Administration

In the spring of 2017, Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) engaged Huron Consulting Group to conduct a review of its clinical research program. A steering committee comprised of hospital leadership and administration and members of the research community provided oversight and guidance for this initiative.

The Department of Research Administration was created as a result of this assessment with the goal of combining both the oncology and cardiology research teams under the direction of Vice President Bo Walpole, MD. The management team for this newly formed department includes: Mindy Muenich, interim director; Trena Davis, oncology research manager; and Donna Patrick, cardiology research manager.

The committee also decided that outsourcing its administrative functions, such as coverage analysis development, contract and budget review/negotiation, claims review and sponsor invoicing to the Huron Research Office would best meet the department's objectives for reduced start-up time, improved efficiency, reduced costs and future growth.

Additionally, NGMC is in the process of transitioning its Institutional Review Board (IRB) operations and oversight of its existing and future research to the Western Institutional Review Board (WIRB), an AAHRPP-accredited external IRB. Efforts to streamline processes and develop standard operating procedures are currently in progress.

NGMC currently has approximately 100 open clinical research studies. This reorganization will provide the infrastructure to support research processes, allow for growth of the research program and provide a collaborative mechanism for the new Graduate Medical Education (GME) program.



## Community Outreach Spotlight

Angie Caton, RN

Oncology Clinical Outreach Coordinator

A number of offerings aimed at community and staff education, early detection, screening and prevention were provided throughout our service area during 2017, including:

- **Cancer patient navigators touched more than 1,170 patients**, helping address barriers to care such as education, transportation and financial assistance.
- **6% of cancer patients enrolled to clinical trials** (above the national average).
- **341 patients received a low dose CT screening** for lung cancer.
- **125 people attended our colorectal health educational seminars**, which were held at both NGMC Gainesville and NGMC Braselton.
- Through a partnership with the City of Gainesville's Wellness Department, **NGMC provided tobacco cessation education and resources to more than 40 City of Gainesville employees** over three dates.
- **Provided free oral, head and neck cancer screenings** at NGMC through the Head and Neck Cancer Alliance. Of the 25 screened, 5 abnormal results were found.
- **Provided free thyroid screenings and education for 61 people** at the HealthSmart Expo in October. While no nodules or masses were detected, 3 people were recommended to follow up with their physician due to asymmetrical fullness.
- **Lung cancer patients and their loved ones** continue to **have access to monthly Lung Support Groups**, which are conducted by our lung cancer patient navigator.
- Continued our **Clinical Communications Newsletter**, which provides clinical staff with new information and updates related to patient care and professional practice.
- **Presented on end-of-life care and ethics education** at the 2017 Georgia Chapter of Compassion and Choices in Atlanta, GA.
- **Local and national cancer resources provided** via the NGMC website.
- **Targeted educational programs offered to oncology bedside clinical staff and providers**, including:
  - Monthly lunchtime ethics programs
  - Colorectal cancer awareness
  - Genetics education
  - Hand massage for pain control
  - Review course for OCN certification
  - MRI safety
  - Prescription opioid therapy
  - Sepsis
  - Lung cancer screening
  - Employee Mammogram Day