

*We look forward
to caring for you.*



sgmc.org

209 Pendleton Drive | Valdosta GA 31602

Patient Guide

FEBRUARY 2016

Welcome

The goal of the Pearlman Comprehensive Cancer Center is to offer treatment and support to our patients and their families as they face the challenge of a difficult diagnosis. We serve the citizens of Lowndes County and the surrounding region with state-of-the-art seamless health care. Our center combines the unique and varied resources essential to caring for our patients in one comprehensive facility.

This guide will introduce you to our staff and some of our services. We understand that your diagnosis can impact virtually every aspect of your life. We also understand that while your physical needs may take precedence during your cancer diagnosis, you will also have psychological, social and spiritual needs during this time. Our goal is to help you address any needs you may have as you go through your cancer experience. Your quality of life is important to us as we strive to deliver excellent care with compassion. We hope to become partners with you and your healthcare providers as you begin your journey on the road to healing.

Thank you for letting us serve you.

Main Number..... 229.259.4600
Appointments..... 229.259.4600
After Hours..... 229.433.1000

manage the long-term and late effects. This team will also help you develop a plan to live a healthy life and provide you with resources to meet the challenges you may face as a survivor.

One of the most important items after your treatment is complete is the communication between your Oncology Team and your primary care providers. All adult cancer survivors should have a Survivorship Care Plan that summarizes your treatments and outlines a plan for your follow-up care. The Cancer Center's Nurse Practitioners will develop this treatment summary and provide you with a **LIVESTRONG** care plan. A copy will be provided to your primary care provider as well. These documents are individualized to your cancer experience and an important communication resource for you to share with all of your health care providers.



Community Health Screenings

South Georgia Medical Center's Community Health Promotions offers an assortment of free health screenings for the community. To receive more information concerning health screenings, contact Community Health Promotions at 229.433.1074.

Many of the treatments you receive at the Cancer Center will depend directly on your lab work. Your lab work can be many different types of tests; blood, stool or urine samples, pathology and other types of specimens. Our lab personnel will know which tests the doctor needs and provide you with instructions for specific tests. The result times may vary depending on which tests are completed. Some labs can be resultated almost immediately, while others may take as long as seven to ten working days. Our lab personnel will be happy to inform you of what to expect.

If you are scheduled to have labs drawn *or* are seeing the physician, and another physician outside the Cancer Center needs labs drawn also, we will try to accommodate that request. Please call our main number at 229.259.4600 **PRIOR** to your clinic visit as you will need to be registered separately for any outside physicians. If you need labs drawn from an outside physician and you do not already have an appointment at the cancer center, you may use SGMC's Walk-In Outpatient Lab, located in The Professional Building, 2409 North Patterson Street, 229.333.1721, for those services.

Survivorship Program

If you have been diagnosed with cancer, you are a survivor. Survivorship starts at the time of disease diagnosis and continues throughout the rest of your life. The Pearlman Cancer Center has been in the forefront of the development and growth of the survivorship movement.

Although the completion of treatment is an exciting time for most, it can also be a time of anxiety and uncertainty for some. The Cancer Center's team of professionals recognizes that, as a survivor, you need education and support to help you navigate life after cancer. During this phase of your journey, you will heal from the short-term effects of treatment and learn to

Patients are welcome to sit in the lobby or other designated areas until the nurse calls them into the Chemo/Infusion Room. This is for your safety and the safety of other patients. Due to the compromised immune systems of our patients, we ask that no children under the age of 12 be brought to the Cancer Center. Children are not allowed beyond our front lobby and must be supervised at all times by an adult member of your family.

For your convenience, and to provide a peaceful environment, we gladly provide earbuds for watching television.

You may be coming to the Cancer Center for shots or labs. If you need refills or are having any medical problems that need to be addressed, please call your physician's Nurse Navigator **PRIOR** to your visit. This will help us meet your needs with minimal delay.

Patients with LifePorts/Port-a-Caths are encouraged to wear clothing that buttons up the front or has a low, scooped neckline for easy access. Avoid wearing turtlenecks or tight clothing.

As you complete your cancer care you will need to make appointments to have your LifePort/Port-a-Cath flushed every six (6) weeks until it is removed.

During your treatment and follow up visits with the Cancer Center, you will come in contact with many different individuals, each with a specialized function to serve you.

These individuals are:

- Physicians
- Nursing Staff
- Nurse Navigators
- Lab Technicians
- Dietitian
- Radiation Therapists
- Medical Records Personnel
- Registration Clerk & Receptionist
- Nurse Practitioners
- Research Nurse
- Social Worker
- Patient Care Technicians
- Radiation Physicist
- Financial Counselors
- Chaplain
- Medical Dosimetrists

Primary Care Doctors

Your primary care doctor plays a very important role in your health care and should continue to provide you with your routine medical care outside of the Cancer Center. Asking your other doctors to fax us a copy of any blood work completed in their office is very helpful. There may be times when you will need a primary care doctor during your treatment. If you do not have a primary care doctor, we can help you find one.

You may contact the doctor during regular business hours (Monday-Friday, 8:30am-5pm) at 229.259.4600. You will be transferred to the physician's Nurse Navigator first. This is a confidential voice mail system and the nurse will obtain your medical chart and relay your needs to the doctor. We will answer your calls in the **order of urgency** and most calls are answered by 5pm that day. To contact the on-call physician, after-hours, on weekends or on holidays, call 229.433.1000.

If you think you may be having a medical emergency, call 911.

We ask that you follow these guidelines:

- Leaving full information when you call will help us to meet your needs. Leave your name, phone number and details about your problem or question. If you are experiencing side effects from your treatment, it is helpful for us to know your last treatment date.
- When calling for lab results, please allow 24 hours for test turnaround.
- When calling for radiology results, please allow 48 hours for your doctor to receive a report.

Prescriptions

It is important for you to carefully monitor your medicine for refills, as it may take longer than 24 hours to obtain the insurance or physician authorization necessary to refill your medication. When you see that you are running low on your medications, please have your pharmacy call us and request a refill. We will be happy to assist you in any way we can, but we ask that you order your refills before you run out completely since, on occasion, your doctor may not be available to authorize refills. Please note, refills will not be called in on the weekends.

The Cancer Center staff, including the Social Worker and Dietitian, are integral parts of your overall experience. They work together as part of a team that will strive to be patient advocates and enhance your experience with the Cancer Center.

Cancer Education

We believe that knowledge is power. The Cancer Center provides patients with individualized educational information about their disease and treatment. We offer materials that meet the needs of our diverse patient population. If you need additional education due to problems with literacy levels, language barriers or other disabilities, please let us know. The nursing staff provides individualized education for new patients starting chemotherapy. This education will help you better understand the medications, their side effects and how to take care of yourself during treatment. Our chemotherapy patients will be provided a booklet that contains information that relates to their specific treatment. This booklet is a valuable resource during therapy.

Dietary Services

The Cancer Center has a registered dietitian on staff to serve your nutritional needs. The Dietitian can help you determine an appropriate diet, overcome food issues during treatment, assist you with supplemental nutrition, and provide disease-specific nutritional education (*i.e. diabetic, decreasing cholesterol and weight reduction*).

The Dietitian is available by appointment or by calling 229.259.4630.

The Cancer Center is committed to working with you and your insurance company to ensure proper billing and maintenance of your financial account. It is helpful if you bring all necessary insurance information with you on the first appointment. If there have been any changes in your account information since your last registration, please notify us immediately. These changes could include addresses or phone numbers, insurance information and emergency contact information. The Cancer Center's financial team is available to address your financial questions and assist you in navigating programs that are designed to assist with your financial needs.

Identity Protection

During registration, the registrar will ask you if your fingerprint may be scanned. This scan will create a unique ID that verifies your identity and protects your medical records against medical identity theft. The scan takes less than 30 seconds and your fingerprint is not stored. Once your scan has been created, you can use it to register for other services within the SGMC health system.

Patient Portal

You will also receive an invitation to join MyHealthSGMC. This is a free online patient portal that allows you to view portions of your medical record. It is safe, secure and available anytime, anywhere you have internet access. Visit smgc.org/myhealthsgmc to sign up.

Your doctor may prescribe chemotherapy, immunotherapy or infusion services. Our newly renovated infusion area allows you to receive treatments in a calm, comforting, homelike environment.

Chemotherapy is the treatment of cancer with drugs that can destroy cancer cells. It does so by impeding the cells' growth and reproduction.

Immunotherapy may also be prescribed. Immunotherapy drugs use the body's own immune system to fight cancer cells. **Support therapy** such as fluids, antibiotics, blood and platelet transfusions are also given in this area.

Individualized treatment regimens are designed specifically for you by your physician. Treatment lengths and side effects vary greatly depending on your diagnosis. Our specially-trained staff will provide you with extensive education regarding your specific treatment. They will also address any concerns and answer all questions you may have.

We welcome one family member to share your experience and provide support. You may enjoy watching television, playing games or reading together during your treatment. Snacks and drinks are provided for our patients. Lunch is also provided for Infusion Area patients. You are more than welcome to bring your favorite food selections.

Injections

Sometimes your doctor will order injections to help boost your blood counts. Injections are scheduled **Monday-Friday, 8am-9:30am** or **3pm-4pm**. On **Saturdays and Sundays**, the injections time is at **9am**. On the weekend, it is important that you are on time for your appointment as the Cancer Center closes once all injections are administered.

The Cancer Center provides a Licensed Clinical Social Worker to assist patients and their families with financial issues, transportation, prescription drug assistance, community resource referrals and counseling services. We try to help you to identify and use existing resources as efficiently as possible.

You can contact the Social Worker and counseling services by calling 229.259.4638. Support groups are offered monthly and individual counseling is available by appointment.

The Partnership Cancer Fund Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Partnership Cancer Fund is a non-profit organization that provides financial assistance to medically needy cancer patients undergoing cancer treatment. This fund is available to help with costs associated with transportation to and from doctor and treatment appointments, nutritional supplements, durable medical equipment and certain medications.

Applications are available through the Pearlman Comprehensive Cancer Center Social Worker and South Georgia Partnership for Health. If you are interested in more information about this fund, contact our Social Worker by calling 229.259.4638.

If you need an appointment, please call the Cancer Center's main line at 229.259.4600. An automated system will give you options to access the appropriate department.

If you cannot keep an appointment, please cancel at least 24-hours in advance. We realize that sometimes there are circumstances beyond your control. If you are going to be late, please call immediately so we may make arrangements for you to be seen.

If you are more than 15 minutes late for a scheduled appointment, your appointment will be rescheduled to a later date.

Pearlman Comprehensive Cancer Center employs state-of-the-art technology in our radiation facility. Our latest installation is the Elekta Synergy Digital Linear Accelerator with Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy (IMRT) and Image Guided Radiation Therapy (IGRT). This addition combines advanced imaging capability with the most precise radiation treatment delivery available.

Our Radiation and Medical Oncologists work closely together when your treatment plan involves both radiation and chemotherapy.

Radiation is delivered Monday through Friday. The actual treatment typically lasts about 15 minutes and treatment times are generally scheduled at the same time each day. Depending on your diagnosis and the goal of treatment, radiation may continue for as little as two weeks or as long as seven and a half weeks. Your Radiation Oncologist will determine the best plan of care for you. During your treatment course, you will be seen once a week by the physician for evaluation and management of side effects. This visit typically occurs on Monday or Tuesday each week so please plan to be here longer on that day.

Before you begin your treatment, you will be given education and important details about your care. Your team will consist of the Radiation Oncologist, the Physicist and Dosimetrists, the Radiation Therapists, and the Radiation Nurse.

In conjunction with South Georgia Medical Center, we strive to assist you in any way we can to ensure that your insurance needs are met. To help us accurately bill for services, you will need to make sure your insurance information is up-to-date.

If you do not have insurance, you will be referred to our social worker or someone from SGMC's Patient Financial Services to help with your financial needs. You may be eligible for programs that assist with treatment-related expenses.

Most insurance companies do not require a pre-certification for services rendered by our physicians. They do, however, require a pre-certification for chemotherapy and radiation, many types of IV treatments and all scans and tests performed for diagnostic purposes.

The Cancer Center has a pre-certification specialist who oversees this process. They may contact you for information or to advise you about any insurance issues that arise during your care. **Please remember that ultimately, you are responsible for verifying that all pre-certifications are completed prior to receiving care.**

Should you have questions about pre-certification, you may contact our pre-cert specialist by calling 229.259.4617.

Clinical research has resulted in major advances in cancer care over the last few decades. Research studies, also called clinical trials, test new medications or drugs currently on the market in different combinations. Our Cancer Center offers research for most major types of cancer. These studies are sponsored by the National Cancer Institute or by pharmaceutical companies. Your doctor can tell you if we have any studies available for you. While some studies try to cure or control the cancer, others seek to improve the quality of the cancer patient's life. Both types of studies are important in finding new ways to battle this disease.

Deciding to enroll in a clinical trial is an important decision. Talk it over with your family and friends. Talk to other research patients. Ask your doctor questions. Make sure you are well informed and feel confident about making the decision that is right for you.

For more information on clinical research, ask your doctor or call our Clinical Research Nurse at 229.259.4698. The National Cancer Institute has a website (www.cancer.gov) that provides useful information to patients who want to learn more about clinical trials.

All clinical trials are monitored by an ethics committee to ensure your safety.

A complete listing of current trials is available online at sgmc.org/trials.