

CLEVELAND/AKRON/CANTON

# MDNEWS<sup>®</sup>

■ A BUSINESS & PRACTICE MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE | ABOUT PHYSICIANS | FROM PHYSICIANS | FOR PHYSICIANS ■



## Edward Walsh, MD

'Outstanding Achievement'  
in Cancer Care at Mercy  
Medical Center

# Edward Walsh, MD

## ‘Outstanding Achievement’ in Cancer Care at Mercy Medical Center

By Alex Strauss

EVERY YEAR, NEARLY 900 NEW CANCER PATIENTS WALK THROUGH THE DOORS OF THE MERCY CANCER CENTER IN CANTON, OHIO. THESE PATIENTS ARE LOOKING FOR COMPREHENSIVE CARE AND COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT TO HELP THEM IN THEIR FIGHT AGAINST CANCER. WITH ADVANCED DIAGNOSTICS, INNOVATIVE MEDICAL AND SURGICAL TREATMENTS, THE ADVANTAGES OF OFFERING NATIONAL CANCER RESEARCH TRIALS CLOSE TO HOME, AND A VAST ARRAY OF SUPPORT SERVICES, MERCY CANCER CENTER IS UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO MEET THOSE NEEDS.

“**WE BELIEVE IN OFFERING** the complete package to patients within the community hospital setting,” says Edward Walsh, MD, medical director of the Cancer Center and Radiation Oncology at Mercy.

A board-certified radiation oncologist, Dr. Walsh completed his residency training at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. He came to Mercy nine years ago from University Hospitals in Cleveland and serves as an assistant clinical professor at his alma mater Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine.

“Cancer management these days requires taking a very comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach,” says Dr. Walsh. “At Mercy Cancer Center, physicians, surgeons, radiation oncologists, medical oncologists, oncology-certified nurses and case managers all work very closely to produce the best possible outcomes.”

It is this approach to care that has earned Mercy’s cancer program accreditation by the American College of Surgeons (ACOS) since 1986 and an Outstanding Achievement Award for exceptional performance from the ACOS Commission on Cancer in 2008. This award recognizes cancer programs that strive for excellence in providing quality care to cancer patients. It is a distinction held by fewer than 20 percent of cancer programs across the United States.

And Stark County patients and their referring physicians

are taking note. According to Dr. Walsh, the number of new patients seeking care at Mercy Cancer Center in its 17-bed inpatient Oncology Unit and Outpatient Infusion Center grew by 18 percent from 2008 to 2009.

### Advanced Diagnostics

Mercy’s collaborative approach to cancer care begins with regular tumor conferences for breast and lung cancer cases twice a month as well as weekly tumor conferences for other types of cancer. During these meetings, Mercy physicians and surgeons from multiple disciplines confer on complex cases and discuss the treatment options available at the Cancer Center.

“We try to be very prospective with our tumor boards and discuss these cases prior to initiating treatment when possible,” explains Dr. Walsh. “This is more challenging in a community hospital like ours than it would be in a larger, academic setting where the specialists are all in one building, but we feel that it is very important for our patients.”

Imaging technology also plays an important role in treatment planning, and Mercy has a vast array including ultrasounds to guide needle biopsies; nuclear scanners; stereotactic breast biopsy technology; MRI, including breast MRI; and both traditional and helical CT scanners. The specialized helical CT scanner has the ability to scan faster and provide even greater visualization of blood vessels and internal tissues than traditional CT scanners.



Mercy Cancer Center, led by Edward Walsh, MD, was the first in Stark County to offer intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) and the first to offer TomoTherapy which, when used with IMRT, enables radiation oncologists to more precisely focus and manipulate the radiation beam. Shown here with Dr. Walsh is Sherri Schweningen, RT(T).

One of the most advanced technologies available at Mercy Cancer Center is a dedicated hybrid PET/CT scanner. This scanner is capable of detecting areas of elevated glucose metabolism and internal anatomical abnormalities to produce three-dimensional images with remarkable clarity. And because Mercy Cancer Center's PET/CT scanner is an inhouse unit, rather than a mobile leased unit, patient scheduling is fast and easy.

"These advanced technologies all give us a better view, which allows us not only to diagnose more accurately but also to help patients decide on the best treatment options for their individual situation," says Dr. Walsh.

### **Innovative Treatments**

In addition to advanced diagnostics, Mercy Cancer Center is also ahead of the curve in its options for cancer treatment. It was the first in Stark County to offer intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) and the first to offer TomoTherapy which, when used with IMRT, enables radiation oncologists to more precisely focus and manipulate the radiation beam to maximize the effect of radiation on the tumor, while minimizing damage to surrounding healthy tissue. This enables an increased curative dose with decreased side effects.

Mercy was also the first in Stark County to offer minimally invasive cancer surgery utilizing the da Vinci Robotic Surgical

System. This robotic surgical system enables surgeons to operate with unmatched precision utilizing hands-free controls and 3D high-definition vision. It is a safer, less traumatic surgical alternative to traditional and laparoscopic cancer surgeries for prostate, gynecological and colon cancers. Because of the growing demand for robotic-assisted surgery, Mercy now has two robots, as well as two dedicated Robotic Surgical Suites.

"We have invested in what we believe to be the best technology so that cancer patients in this region can feel confident about getting high quality care without having to go far from home," says Dr. Walsh.

Mercy Cancer Center patients also have the advantage of being able to participate in national clinical trials, giving them access to potentially valuable new treatments and drugs that are not yet widely available. Mercy participates in cancer research through its affiliation with the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group (ECOG), the Radiation Therapy in Oncology Group (RTOG), the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP) and the Clinical Trials Support Unit (CTSU).

"Participation in clinical trials is an important part of being a progressive cancer center," says Dr. Walsh. "The CTSU is a particularly valuable affiliation for us because it provides a compendium of protocols from different groups, giving small to medium size hospitals like ours greater access to various trials."

Current national trials at Mercy Cancer Center include those for patients with breast, esophageal, colon, bladder, prostate, gynecological, and head and neck, and metastatic bone cancers as well as leukemia and melanoma.

### Empowering Support

As important as these diagnostic and treatment options are, Dr. Walsh emphasizes that these are only part of the total picture in Mercy's comprehensive approach to cancer care.

"Technology and trials are great, but a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming for patients," says Dr. Walsh. "There is so much they have to learn so quickly, and they have so many questions. It's like trying to get a college education in a few days."

At Mercy, no cancer patient has to face the diagnosis of cancer and its often scary treatments alone. Through the Nurse Navigator program, specially-trained nurses – including those dedicated specifically to breast and lung cancer – provide a single point of contact at the hospital for each patient, guiding them and their families through the maze of treatments, information, and support services. By helping patients obtain answers and connect with services quickly, Dr. Walsh says the program benefits referring physicians as well as patients.

"New cancer patients tend to have so many questions, but doctors are getting busier and busier and trying to do more with less time," says Dr. Walsh. "The Nurse Navigator doesn't keep a stopwatch running when she talks to a patient. She



The Mercy Boutique is just down the hall from the Cancer Center next to the Breast Health Center. Here, patients can find a wide variety of items such as mastectomy supplies, hats and wigs, lymphedema care items, custom breast prostheses and aromatherapy products.

is there to give patients the time and help they need, when they need it."

Customized assistance is also offered to patients and their families through Mercy's Lung Center. Here, dedicated specialists from pulmonary medicine, medical oncology, radiation oncology and thoracic surgery, with the support of pathology and radiology, provide the highest level of care to patients with benign and malignant conditions.

Because knowledge is empowering, the Mercy Cancer Center offers a comprehensive cancer resource library with books, video and audio resources and Internet access. Patients can also take advantage of a variety of complementary programs including yoga, tai chi, massage therapy, stress management, dietary, psychological and spiritual counseling, educational workshops and a variety of support groups offered at Mercy. And in the Mercy Boutique, just down the hall from the Cancer Center and right next to the Breast Health Center, patients can find a wide variety of items such as mastectomy supplies, hats and wigs, lymphedema care items, custom breast prostheses and aromatherapy products.

"We have come a long way from the days when a patient came in, was told they had cancer, and went for chemotherapy and that was it," says Dr. Walsh. "Today, it is about providing the whole array of diagnostics, treatments and services that are going to support those patients all along the way. That is what we have tried to do here, in a very warm, caring community hospital environment."

*For more information about the Mercy Cancer Program, or to refer a patient, call 330-430-2788.* ■



(L-R) Navigator Bobbi Freeman, RN, BSN, Randall Harris, MD and Alan Rudick, DO, review a patient's diagnosis and treatment plan. Through the Nurse Navigator program, specially-trained nurses provide a single point of contact at the hospital for each patient, guiding them and their families through the maze of treatments, information, and support services.