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**Commonwealth
Hematology-
Oncology**



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Community-Based Physicians Bring World-Class Cancer Care to Locations Close to Patients' Homes

By Kathryn J. Siranosian, M.S.

Over the past decade, researchers have made dramatic advances in cancer care, and outcome studies show significant improvements in survival rates. However, patients still dread hearing the diagnosis of cancer from their physician. Just the word itself can send their thoughts racing, with concerns running the gamut from medical to emotional.

Of course, each patient copes with the news in his or her own way,

We recognize that primary care physicians are the most important link in the medical care community. Our job is to provide them with the best service, and to provide their patients with the best service.

—Walt Kagan, M.D., Ph.D.
CHO president

but two questions in particular are typical: “Where will I get treated?” and “How will treatment affect my life at home and at work?”

Fortunately, physicians now can offer generally reassuring answers. That’s because it’s likely that high-quality cancer care is available close to the patient’s home, in a comfortable, community-based setting.

South Weymouth office. From left: Douglas “Gus” Tisdale, M.D., Carol Mei, M.D., and Michael J. Anderson, M.D. Not seen: James R. Everett, M.D. The recently expanded Weymouth office is located next to South Shore Hospital.

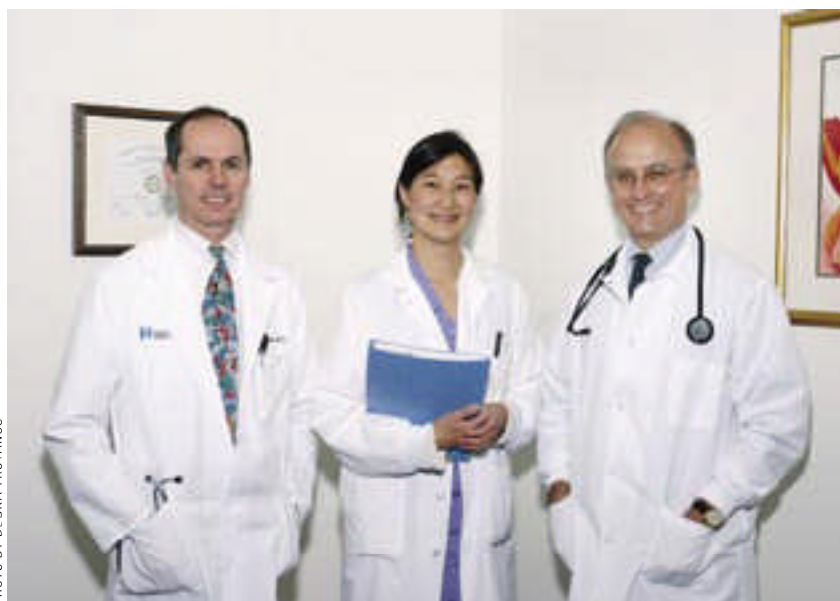


PHOTO BY DEBRA TROYANOS

Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology P.C., New England’s largest private cancer care network, has numerous locations throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The group’s 23 oncologists-hematologists, eight nurse practitioners, and 30 oncology nurses are dedicated to personalized, world-class community-based cancer care, a mission that has guided CHO’s president, Walt Kagan, M.D., Ph.D., since he started his practice as an oncologist in Quincy, MA, more than 20 years ago.

“That’s really the focus of all of our physicians and all of our offices — we are community doctors,” Dr. Kagan explained. “We’re not hospital-owned; we’re not hospital-controlled. We are independent, community-based physicians. At the same time, we have extremely high standards for the care that we give. Our patients receive

state-of-the-art care, as good as they can get anywhere else in the world, and it’s in a community setting.”

SAFE AT HOME

For many years, there was the notion that world-class cancer care was only available at Boston’s medical centers and teaching hospitals. But, for many patients, treatment in a smaller, community-based office has numerous advantages. For instance, visits to a local oncologist are more convenient. Since most treatment plans require several appointments, it’s much less disruptive to home and work schedules if the offices are nearby. Also, many patients feel more comfortable and less intimidated in a private office setting, where they routinely see their own personal physician.

In addition to convenience and comfort, patients who receive treatments locally benefit by staying close to their support network of family, friends and other neighborhood medical professionals.

“We’re part of the local medical community, and we see our role as helping the primary care doctors and the other specialists in the community,” Dr. Kagan said. “We recognize that primary care physicians are the most important link in the medical care community. Our job is to provide them with the best service, and

to provide their patients with the best service.”

When appointments are convenient, and a cohesive support system is nearby, it’s also likely that patients will more effectively manage treatment side effects and complete their treatment protocol successfully.

While most patients enjoy the advantages of being treated close to home, some still don’t believe that world-class cancer care is available outside of urban hospitals. In fact, advances in technology and treatments have made high-quality cancer care routine in community-based settings like the offices in the CHO network. Because the group’s oncologists use evidence-based medicine and nationally accepted guidelines, CHO patients can be assured that they receive the quality care they need. And Dr. Kagan believes that community-based care is generally more cost-effective.



Concord office. Located in the Bethke Cancer Center of Emerson Hospital, Jon S. DuBois, M.D., consults with colleagues Susan A. Sajer, M.D., and Ewa Niemierko, M.D. Not seen: Humberto A. Rossi, M.D.

A COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

“We have been intimately involved in national quality initiatives, and we were also very early to adopt the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines,” said Dr. Kagan. “The way we practice is to use national standards, not over-treating and not under-treating.”

As another example of CHO’s commitment to quality initiatives, Dr. Kagan described how he and his colleagues helped design Intellidose, an automated chemotherapy ordering system that helps prevent drug-dosing errors.

“The chemotherapy ordering software that we helped develop was state-of-the-art and now is recognized as the most effective software for ensuring that there are no drug errors — and we were the first community group to make this available,” he said.

Patients throughout CHO’s service area can also take advantage of the latest clinical trials.

While a commitment to quality and technology are the underpinnings of CHO’s practice, Dr. Kagan also measures his group’s success by the strong relationships between doctors and patients. Each CHO office benefits from centralized support systems and economies of



Quincy office. This office, which serves as the group’s headquarters, is also the home base of CHO’s network-wide Patient Advocacy Program. From right, Ann Stewart reviews reimbursement options with patients. Quincy office physicians are: Mark E. Anderson, M.D., Walt Kagan, M.D., Ph.D., Sarah K. May, M.D., Therese M. Mulvey, M.D., and Paul C. Musto, M.D.

scale; at the same time, each has its own personality and special relationships. Patients enjoy a continuity of care, and they often develop a friendly rapport with their oncologist and oncology nurse.

“Patients get to know their doctor and their nurses. They have more of a personalized experience than is usually available in an academic teaching hospital,” he said.

As it turns out, these relationships can lead to significant future health benefits because they may make it more likely that a patient will continue with important follow-up appointments.

“Sometimes there are late complications of treatment, and we’re on the look-out for that,” Dr. Kagan explained. “We have a heightened sense of awareness for the things that need to be followed for individual patients. The primary care doctor may not be as familiar with the potential late complications of chemotherapy or radiation. It is our responsibility to anticipate those kinds of things.”

Long-term annual check-ups with their CHO oncologist also allow patients to benefit from the most recent cancer technol-

Stoneham office. Nasima Khatoon, M.D., from CHO’s modern Stoneham office, has been honored as “Best Oncologist” by *Boston Magazine*.





Worcester and Leominster offices. In the newly renovated Worcester office, Vijay Kasturi, M.D., reviews laboratory results. Not seen: David Shepro, M.D., and Susan Donohue, M.D.

ogy and protocol improvements.

“Cancer care is getting better and better, with lots of exciting advances and treatment changes,” Dr. Kagan said. “CHO is committed to providing local medical professionals — including specialists, hospital administrators and insurance executives — with a steady stream of educational material.”

These days, with cancer sur-

vival rates continuing to improve, many cancer patients can count on long-term relationships with their oncologists, and that pleases Dr. Kagan. “We strive to provide the best clinical care while we also ‘care for the whole person.’ What’s important is that all of us in the medical community work together to help empower our patients and optimize their level of care. As far as I’m concerned, when I see someone for a 20-year check-up, that’s my reward for being in oncology.” ■



Merrimack Valley/North Shore offices. Pedro Sanz-Altamira, M.D., Ph.D., concludes a patient visit on a light note. CHO offices in this region are in Lawrence, Haverhill, Newburyport and Methuen. Not seen: Silwan “Solly” Chedid, M.D., Jack Evjy, M.D., Yamil Kouri, M.D., Carmen Ligia Pisc, M.D. and Paul J. Spieler, M.D.

Three Decades of Service

While many hospitals and physician groups have struggled in recent years to keep pace with health care inflation and diminishing reimbursements, CHO has flourished, becoming the largest private practice cancer care group in New England. Its mission to provide personalized, high-quality care close to home has resonated with patients, primary care physicians and allied health care professionals.

CHO’s service spans more than three decades. Before being incorporated as Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology PC, Walt Kagan, M.D., Ph.D., and other private practice oncologists strategized about ways to keep community-based cancer care afloat in the wake of burgeoning HMOs.

“We realized that by working together we could build the infrastructure to support a world-class practice,” Dr. Kagan explained. “Now, we have centralized billing, centralized management, and centralized ordering. But we are all community doctors, devoted to patients in our local communities.”

Throughout the years, the practice has grown steadily throughout eastern and central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. Indeed, “branching out” has become an apt metaphor, playing off the group’s tree of life logo.

Last year, CHO opened offices in Haverhill and Leominster. It also launched the community’s first Patient Advocacy program, a free service that helps patients fight their financial battles. And it continues offering leading-edge clinical trials with several academic centers.

Today, CHO has offices and clinics in Brighton*, Concord, Dorchester, Haverhill, Lawrence, Leominster, Malden, Methuen, Milton, Newburyport, Quincy, Stoneham, South Weymouth, Waltham* and Worcester. CHO hospital affiliations include: Anna Jaques Hospital in Newburyport; Caritas Carney Hospital in Dorchester; Columbian-Parkland Medical Center in Derry, NH; Emerson Hospital in Concord; Health Alliance Hospital in Leominster; Holy Family Hospital in Methuen; Lawrence General Hospital; Melrose-Wakefield Hospital; Milton Hospital; Merrimack Valley Hospital in Haverhill; Quincy Medical Center; South Shore Hospital in Weymouth; and St. Vincent’s Hospital and UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester.

For more information, including articles, newsletters, screening guidelines, clinical trials and patient support database, visit www.chomed.com.

*Boris Karpovsky, M.D. practices in these offices.