

Collaborative Cancer Care You Can Count On



ADVENTHEALTH GORDON TUMOR BOARD

Once a month, a team of tumor-fighting specialists gathers to review the case files of cancer patients being treated at the AdventHealth Gordon Cancer Center.

“The goal is to make sure we have as complete of a plan as possible in our approach to the patient and the individual at such a critical time in their life,” said Joe Joyave, MD, chief medical officer of AdventHealth Gordon and AdventHealth Murray. “It’s not all about the cure; it’s about care.”

Dr. Joyave is one of several physicians, nurses and allied health providers who participate in the monthly Tumor Board conferences to discuss the treatment plans for patients who are battling lung, breast, kidney, prostate and other types of tumor-based cancers.

“Cancer outcomes are better when patients are managed according to the principles of multidisciplinary team evaluation,” said Lanell Jacobs, director of oncology services at AdventHealth Gordon. “Our conferences include a physician representative from surgery, pathology, radiology, radiation oncology and medical oncology. Additional folks include the dietitian, mental health provider, nursing, rehab and other therapies.”

While the board is mindful of National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines to inform the recommended treatments, those who attend the meetings said their discussions serve as a concerted effort to individualize whole-person care so a patient’s physical, emotional and spiritual needs are met.

“When we go through the cases, every member discusses patients as individuals who have individual needs,” said William Tong, MD, a radiation oncologist and the medical director of AdventHealth Harris Radiation Therapy Center. “It’s not uncommon that we are talking about a patient’s social situation, family support situations or even the logistical aspects related to transportation or costs of insurance with medications.”

Hak Lee, MD, director of robotic surgery at AdventHealth Gordon and urologic oncologist with AdventHealth Medical Group Urology at Calhoun,

agreed, saying the Tumor Board gives the team a chance to do more than just review pathology reports and discuss treatment options.

“The end-game is increasing overall survival and quality of life,” he said. “Patients have families. They have jobs they want to return to and social activities they want to return to. An important aspect is we not only take care of the cancer, but we also take care of the patient.”

The board reviews anywhere from six to ten patient files each month, with each participant contributing to the discussion as it relates to his or her specialty and experience.

“It brings experiential value to the table by having the different minds there together,” said Craig Box, MD, medical director of the Edna Owens Breast Center and surgical oncologist with AdventHealth Medical Group General Surgery at Calhoun. “We share all the updated information in our individual disciplines. A lot of times there are nuanced issues and cases that don’t fit into the pre-described category, and we can collaborate within our different disciplines to come up with a good plan that is efficient and effective. Oftentimes, somebody in the room will say, ‘Hey, have you tried this? Studies have shown this. I came across this, and here are some ideas you might want to try.’”

The collaborative setting benefits patients who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to undergo the treatment recommended by the NCCN guidelines.

“The cases often brought (before the board) are the ones that don’t fit into the guidelines, either because the patient has a complicated cancer or other issues that complicate their cancer care,” said Mayur Mody, MD, an oncologist with AdventHealth Medical Group Hematology Oncology at Calhoun. “Those cases need creativity and thinking outside the box, and there’s no better place to do that other than a multidisciplinary board.”

Dr. Lee agreed, saying the best plans are the ones that are tailored to a patient’s individual needs.

“Just because I know that radiation is useful doesn’t mean it may be useful for this patient,” he said. “The patient can have comfort knowing that



DR. MAYUR MODY AND DR. CRAIG BOX

all the physicians are talking to each other, are on the same page and all have the same goal with the treatment plan.”

Dr. Tong said the conferences also ensure there isn’t a delay in the delivery of care, particularly since many cancer patients undergo a combination of treatments, which can include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy or immunotherapy.

“Treating someone with cancer can involve a lot of moving parts,” he said. “Getting together allows us to make sure that everything’s coordinated correctly.”

Nurse navigators, a psychotherapist and a dietitian who exclusively work with cancer patients at the AdventHealth Gordon Cancer Center also bring their unique perspectives to the Tumor Board.

“The nurse navigator is following the patient all the way through,” said Oncology Nurse Navigator Christine Bond. “We’re involved in the clinical aspect of care from the point where there’s a suspicious finding to diagnostic testing, treatment and follow-up — even end-of-life care.”

Bond and the allied health providers who participate in the forums offer insight into whether patients are struggling with transportation to appointments, experiencing anxiety over finances, feeling insecure about their appearance or facing other emotional or psychosocial issues beyond the medical treatment of their cancer.

“Nutrition is just as important as any other mode of treatment because you need to continue to support your health to continue fighting cancer,” said Mark Bianchini, AdventHealth Harris Radiation Therapy Center’s dedicated oncology dietitian. “Most oncology programs don’t have a full-time dietitian just for that. This is something very special.”

The inclusion of allied health services in the monthly meetings also ensures any team member can answer patient questions because everyone is aware of the patient’s care plan, he said.

“I want to be able to answer any question a patient may have and help build confidence in their care here by knowing what I’m talking about,” he

said. “Sometimes the patient will open up to one team member, but not the other, so we get a chance to communicate that during the meetings so that we’re all aware of what’s going on in their lives and are better able to help them.”

Bond agreed, saying team members can ask specific questions to gauge a patient’s progress or concerns because care is coordinated across all services.

“It opens a door to them to tell us about their experience and how things are going,” she said.

When Dr. Mody joined AdventHealth in November 2021, he said he was particularly pleased to hear all breast cancer cases are reviewed by the Tumor Board.

“Oftentimes, breast cancer patients need all three (standard) treatments — radiation, chemotherapy and surgery — so the fact that every breast cancer patient is discussed is very important,” he said. “Even when it’s a straightforward case, it’s being assessed because we want to make sure we’re doing it right.”

Rome-based physicians who see patients at the Dr. Gerald McCormick Cancer Center at AdventHealth Redmond have been participating in a regional Tumor Board with two other medical facilities in Floyd County for years, according to Bridget Weiss, AdventHealth Redmond’s Tumor Board registrar. The regional board presents cases much like AdventHealth Gordon’s board discusses theirs, but Weiss said they meet weekly and also review blood-based cancers like leukemia and lymphoma, as well as benign tumors.

“Everyone brings their A-game to the table for every single patient,” she said. “Everyone is doing their own research into what is the newest and best therapy for our patients.”

Patients benefit from improved quality of care and outcomes when those best practices are shared during a Tumor Board forum, Weiss said.

AdventHealth Redmond’s Cancer Center, for instance, is a designated Lung Cancer Screening Center of Excellence that offers early-detection lung lesion and lung cancer diagnostic screenings and a

Lung Nodule Clinic. The Edna Owens Breast Center at AdventHealth Gordon is a Breast Imaging Center of Excellence that is equipped with advanced imaging technologies and a full breadth of breast health services, including genetic testing, breast biopsies and counseling.

Dr. Joyave said hospital leaders often learn about new treatments and technological advances during the Tumor Board conferences that they can then invest in to continue elevating Northwest Georgia’s comprehensive cancer service offerings.

“Administratively, I feel what we add is validation,” he said. “We are committed financially and from the standpoint of a supporting role for those on our front lines.”

Dr. Box said the more frequently physicians collaborate in a Tumor Board setting, the more polished they become in advocating for their patients.

“It’s about building experience, expanding knowledge, improving efficiency,” he said. “In the end, that typically gives patients better outcomes.”



LANELL JACOBS AND DR. HAK LEE