

# Navigating the Cancer Journey

BY LEAH LAWRENCE

Imagine being in a foreign country. You didn't plan to go, but suddenly, there you are. You don't know where anything is or how to get anywhere. Plus, you don't speak the language.

You feel scared and alone.

Then imagine a tour guide finds you. Someone to show you where everything is, how it works and who can help you understand the language ... and they do it all for free.

People who are newly diagnosed with cancer often feel as if they are on an unplanned journey to a foreign country. Approximately 4,530 new cancer cases will be diagnosed in Delaware in 2007, according to the American Cancer Society's Cancer Facts & Figures 2007. These people are thrust into a new, frightening atmosphere with very little knowledge of how anything works and what will happen to them as they begin their treatment journey.

The American Cancer Society Patient Navigator Program at the Christiana Care Health System's Helen F. Graham Cancer Center in Newark is designed to provide guidance for cancer patients, survivors and caregivers to help them navigate the cancer experience with a focus on eliminating barriers to cancer care. The initiative is free and confidential and places an emphasis on assisting the medically underserved.

## A Helping Hand

"If a patient is about to begin chemotherapy or radiation and needs help with transportation, the patient navigator can assist in setting it up," says Patricia Strusowski, Director of Cancer Care Management at the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center. "If a patient is losing

their hair the navigator can help them get set up with the Look Good Feel Better Program."

Other assistance includes counseling for family or children who are struggling with a cancer diagnosis and resources to help patients who have trouble affording necessary medications.

"The navigator's role is not only to talk with patients about things that the American Cancer Society (ACS) can do to help make their lives easier but also to help the patient identify and connect with resources in the

community like the Wellness Community, the Breast Cancer Coalition, Medicaid or United Way," says Patricia Hoge, RN, PhD, Chief Mission Officer of the South Atlantic Division of the American Cancer Society.

"This is a very important additional service for cancer patients,"

she says. "The navigator is able to proactively walk up to newly-diagnosed patients and begin a conversation offering them various kinds of services available in their community rather than that person having to find them all on their own."

The Helen F. Graham Cancer Center is the first site to launch the Patient Navigator program, which will be implemented across the US. AstraZeneca has pledged \$10 million to ACS to develop at least 50 new Patient Navigator Program sites over the next five years in communities throughout the United States.

"We were looking for an opportunity that lines up with our commitment to patient health that was nationwide and large scale enough to have a broad impact at the point of patient care," says Lisa Schoenberg, Vice



President of Specialty Care at AstraZeneca. "We wanted to have an impact in the communities in which our employees live and work."

**Needs Assessment**

The patient navigator at the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center began working full-time in April 2007. She is responsible for assessing the needs of all of the newly-diagnosed cancer patients.

On a long-term basis, the program will offer an improved quality of life for cancer patients, families and caregivers from the time of diagnosis through treatment into survivorship, an increased compliance in treatment and follow-up care due to a greater understanding of issues, and an easier time in navigating the medical, financial and insurance systems.

"We keep in touch with the patient and their families throughout their entire treatment," Strusowski says. "Our help keeps going for as long as the patient needs us. We are constantly reassessing their needs."

For more information about the Patient Navigator Program contact Susan Mayer at the American Cancer Society's New Castle Office at (302) 324-4227 or the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center's Cancer Care Management Department at (302) 623-4700. ■

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# Advocates of Hope

Raising Cancer Awareness in the Business Community

*The State Chamber is taking its cancer awareness message on the road.*



September 18, 2007, 11:30 a.m.– 2:00 p.m.  
 Guest Speaker: Dr. Susan Love  
 Ruddertowne, Dewey Beach



October 31, 2007, 11:30 a.m.– 2:00 p.m.  
 Guest Speaker: Hamilton Jordan  
 Sheraton Dover Hotel, Dover

Each event will also include a panel discussion on risk reduction and survivorship moderated by Patricia Hoge of the American Cancer Society. Registration for each event: \$40 for Chamber members; \$50 for nonmembers. For more information, call (302) 655-7221.

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