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## New Cancer Center a High-tech Marvel

### Alternative therapies key at Providence

By Sharon Salyer, Herald Writer

Providence Regional Cancer Partnership, housed in a \$62.4 million building that opens Monday in Everett, will offer the newest diagnostic and cancer-fighting technologies.

Nearly \$11 million in high-tech cancer machinery will coexist in a building with a variety of complementary or integrative medical therapies, such as yoga and **hypnosis**.

These alternative treatments are now requested by up to 75 percent of cancer patients.

All treatments will be integrated under the hospital's unique approach.

"Your acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine is part of the same medical record as your chemotherapy treatment," said Dr. Cheryl Beigle, director of the center's integrative medicine program.

In addition to the surgeons, oncologists, radiologists and other cancer specialists, there will be counselors and social workers.

There also will be a "patient navigator," a kind of medical quarterback who helps patients find their way through the emotional, financial and medical issues that follow after being diagnosed with cancer.

"You hear the word cancer and your brain ceases to function," said Anne Hartline, a two-time cancer survivor who coordinates the American Cancer Society's breast cancer program in Snohomish County.

"You're so emotional and wiggled out, you can't hear all the stuff you're being told."

The patient navigator will help translate "medicalese into plain English," she said.

Much of the building's programs and design, from the chairs on its chemotherapy floor to the fireplace in its lobby, were based on suggestions from 50 current or former cancer patients.

They were asked: "What things would you have liked done differently?"

With chemotherapy treatments lasting two to four hours, and sometimes as long as nine, patients didn't just want an aesthetically pleasing chair, Hartline said.

They wanted the option of being able to put their feet up and doze.

They wanted the chairs placed so that they could turn to look out the floor-to-ceiling windows for a view of the Cascade Mountains, or swivel the opposite direction to be able to see nearby nurses.



Providence Regional Cancer Center opens Monday in a new \$62.4 million building in Everett that will offer patients a variety of treatment options.

The chairs needed to have big, stable arms, she said, which chemotherapy-fatigued patients can use to help pull themselves up as they stand to leave.

The parking garage was designed so patients can be dropped off at the door of the floor they need to go to that day.

Even the lobby's built-in fireplace is more than an accessory borrowed from the decor of an upscale hotel, Hartline said.

"When you're going through chemotherapy and radiation, it really alters your internal thermostat. Frequently, especially here in the Northwest, you feel really cold.

"That will probably be the thing on walking in, whether it's the first time, or a repeat visit, that will just make (patients) smile," she said. 'Everything one could wish for'

For years, Dr. Will Wisbeck, the center's medical director of radiation oncology, has gone to national scientific meetings and admired the displays of cutting edge cancer-fighting technology.

"It's like a car show," he said, with new machines introduced like concept cars. One in particular caught his eye.

The TomoTherapy machine is able to take 3-D images of the body, showing where tumors are growing or shrinking. That lets the machine deliver radiation exactly where it's needed.

"We began following the technology and hoping that it would be possible to bring one here to Everett."

The trend in radiation therapy has been to use computers to more accurately control the delivery and targeting of radiation, Wisbeck said.

The machine's three-dimensional imaging allows the radiation "to hit a spot the size of a pea."

The TomoTherapy machine at Everett's new cancer center is one of only 120 in the world. Its cutting-edge technology came with an equally impressive price tag, \$3.25 million.

The new cancer center was able to buy this and other high-tech equipment, he said, because of a collaboration among four area medical groups: Providence Everett Medical Center, The Everett Clinic, Western Washington Medical Group and Northwest Washington Radiation Oncology Associates.

"We were able to develop a single, large cancer center rather than having two to three scattered around town," Wisbeck said. "That's allowed us to really have some specialized equipment that wouldn't make sense in a smaller cancer center."

For all the economic sense such a partnership makes, the groups faced huge legal issues, not just in launching the center but in allowing multiple organizations to share patients, said Henry Veldman, chief executive of Western Washington Medical Group.

It took four years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees to solve them, he said. Collaboration among the medical groups didn't wait for the cancer center to open.

In the past, the time lag between an initial cancer diagnosis and the start of treatment could be three to four weeks.

"The longer the wait, the more scared they get," said Hartline, the American Cancer Society volunteer.

Work began three years ago to speed up the process. Now, breast, colon and lung cancer patients have a treatment plan in hand in two weeks, said Jean McMahon, the cancer center's executive director.

Patients will find other procedures at the cancer center more streamlined as well.

Beginning at check-in, cancer patients will be able to fill in the blanks on medical forms just once - on laptops if they prefer - and have that information shared with every one of their doctors.

This saves patients the monotony of filling out nearly identical paperwork with each new specialist.

And up to seven physicians and other specialists will meet four days a week in a large conference room to review patient files and map out the best treatment plans.

This means patients aren't shuffled from office to office around the county to get second opinions, further tests or other treatments.

"From the treatment delivery side, having cancer specialists all at one location will allow much better coordination of their care." Wisbeck said. "On the technical side, this is everything one could wish for."

### **Embracing alternatives**

It wasn't that long ago that it was considered "almost voodoo" to use complementary and alternative medicine as part of cancer treatments, Hartline said.

This might be something as simple as taking vitamins, minerals or herbs or going to an acupuncturist.

During her own treatments for breast cancer in 1997 and 2003, Hartline said, she would sometimes hand an oncologist or surgeon a copy of a study about how complementary medicine can help some cancer patients.

She remembers being told: "Well it won't hurt, but it's a waste of money."

Then nationally recognized medical schools, including Harvard University's, began investigating some of these methods, including using acupuncture to help relieve pain.

The World Health Organization found that patients using some of these techniques didn't have as many issues with nausea or hot flashes, she said. "Western medicine was forced to take notice."

Dr. Andrew Weil, a Harvard Medical School graduate, brought national attention and legitimacy to the role complementary medicine in health care, Hartline said.

At Everett's new cancer center, "we're not just encouraging it, but incorporating" these techniques for patients who want them, she said.

Beighle, the Everett cancer's director of the integrative medicine, is a graduate of the University of Washington's medical school.

She also has received training in mind-body medicine and is certified in clinical hypnosis. She also trained with Weil through a two-year integrative medicine fellowship, which she completed in 2003.

Some chemotherapy patients have an almost automatic or conditioned response to chemotherapy, she said, struggling with nausea and vomiting. And it's well-known that pain is heightened by tension and anxiety.

Relaxation and hypnosis can help some patients lessen these symptoms, giving them a sense of control, she said.

"There are people who are not the least bit interested in this," she said. "That's OK."

"Our goal is ... to have the services available if they want them."

This means acupuncturists can be available to insert their wispy, hair-thin needles while patients are undergoing chemotherapy.

The center's massage therapists have received special training on how to treat cancer patients. And nutritionists will advise patients on what kind of food to eat and help ensure they're getting enough calories.

The center provides "the whole gamut of things that we've heard that patients want," Hartline said.

"It's exciting to be able to tell people you really don't have to go to Seattle" for cancer treatment, she said. "You can get it here, and in one spot."