Dear Friends,

Welcome to our 2018 Report on Cancer, which chronicles the annual accomplishments of an outstanding program that is the first and most trusted resource for the vast majority of people in our community who face a diagnosis of cancer.

That’s because the Cancer Program at BMC continues to meet and exceed all of the standards for outstanding care, delivered by a staff of healthcare professionals who are equally known for their skill and compassion. Their work enhances lives while inspiring confidence and hope in the people and families in our care.

In addition to their own talent and dedication, our caregivers are guided by the same standards in place at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, one of the world’s most renowned centers for cancer research and patient care.

As the proud first member of the Dana-Farber Cancer Care Collaborative, the BMC Cancer Center has access to a full range of resources including the nation’s most accomplished cancer experts. One of the articles in this edition of our Report on Cancer describes how our collaboration impacts the care of local cancer patients, every step of the way through treatment.

Other noteworthy achievements this year include the addition of two new oncologists to our center, an expansion of our extraordinary integrated health program, implementation of a new protocol to ease allergic reactions to chemotherapy medications and more precise imaging to locate, biopsy and remove lung tumors.

In 2019, we will continue our mission to provide the best cancer care possible, with an unwavering focus on the people of Berkshire County who depend on us for care. As always, thank you for your support of the Cancer Center at BMC.

Sincerely,

David E. Phelps
President & CEO
Berkshire Health Systems

The BMC Cancer Center welcomes two new oncologists in 2018.

It was the quality of the staff and their commitment to patients that first attracted Nisar Ahmad, MD, and Thomas Fynan, MD, to the BMC Cancer Center in 2018. Since joining Hematology Oncology Services of BMC, both physicians say their experience here has validated their first impressions.

“The physicians, nurses, medical assistants and pharmacists are all focused on the patients,” said Dr. Fynan. “The colleagues I have met from other specialties are top-notch, and have been warmly welcoming to me. I am very happy I made this move.”

Similarly, Dr. Ahmad said he felt “right at home” at the Hillcrest campus from the moment he arrived, and was impressed by the high level of the center’s cancer care program. “Everyone goes the extra mile to make sure that our patients receive the care they need,” he said.

Dr. Ahmad is board certified and fellowship trained in Hematology and Oncology at the University of Cincinnati. He completed his residency in Internal Medicine at Mt. Sinai Medical Center/Bronx VA Medical Center. He comes to the Berkshires from Harlingen, Texas, where he most recently served with Valley Baptist Medical Center.

Dr. Fynan is board certified in Internal Medicine and Medical Oncology and was fellowship trained in Medical Oncology at Yale University School of Medicine. He completed his residency in Internal Medicine at St. Vincent’s Hospital, New York. A second-generation owner in Stockbridge for 10 years, Dr. Fynan previously served as the Chair of Medical Oncology and Hematology at the Hospital of St. Raphael, New Haven, CT.

Both physicians join Drs. Michael DeLeo, Trevor Belyas and Sean Mulally in providing comprehensive care at the BMC Cancer Center.
A patient at the BMC Cancer Center with a complex diagnosis requests a second opinion. Within days, he has an appointment with a cancer specialist at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute (DFCI) in Boston – one of the world’s most renowned facilities for cancer research and patient care.

Almost as soon as the appointment is over, the oncologist at the BMC Cancer Center has online access to the patient notes entered by the Dana-Farber oncologist in their electronic medical record. Throughout the course of treatment, both physicians at each end of the state can be in contact regarding the patient’s care. In the vast universe of cancer diagnosis and treatment, the world has become a much smaller place for area residents who want the very best in cancer care.

"Partnering with Dana Farber has given us access to such a wealth of information and services which positively impacts the patient’s experience here at BMC," Gazzillo said.

Since 2015, the BMC Cancer Center has been a member of the Dana-Farber Cancer Care Collaborative, which entitles the local cancer center to a host of resources including access to some of the nation’s most accomplished cancer experts, expedited appointments, clinical trials, and education for physicians and nurses on the latest breakthroughs and best practices that will improve care for people in our community.

"And that’s all because we have unique access to one of the leading cancer centers in the world," said Susan Gazzillo, RN, MSN, CRNI, Administrative Director of the BMC Cancer Center and Infusion Services.

In fact, the BMC Cancer Center was the first member of the Dana-Farber Cancer Care Collaborative after demonstrating that the BMC oncology practice met the strict standards of the Boston institute. In the years since, the collaboration has become even more robust with the addition of Stamford Hospital in Connecticut, Eastern Maine Medical Center, UVM Medical, and Cape Cod hospital.

BMC Cancer Center patients can now be enrolled in selected Dana-Farber clinical trials and every Wednesday, oncologists at the BMC Cancer Center log into a live webinar with physicians from Dana-Farber and all of the other collaborative hospitals, where they participate together on patient case review and tumor boards.

"This Collaborative has truly brought us into the bigger oncology community in terms of exposure to the newest therapies, strengthening our already solid relationship with Dana-Farber," said Michael DeLeo, MD, a medical oncologist who serves as the Medical Director of the BMC Cancer Center.

"Now, our doctors have access to a room full of Dana-Farber experts and others and can collaborate with them on the best treatment plans for our patients," Gazzillo said.

Beyond clinical expertise for direct patient care, the DFCI Collaborative provides input and answers to questions that improve everyday functions at the BMC Cancer Center.

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FROM BRONCHOSCOPY TO LUNG CANCER SURGERY—ALL IN THE SAME DAY

More precise imaging to locate and biopsy lung tumors is streamlining the process to surgery.

Berkshire Medical Center launched a lung cancer screening program in 2013, using low-dose CT scans to detect tumors at their earliest and most treatable stage. Since then, the highly successful program has located lung nodules that are smaller and smaller in size.

“This is the main purpose of the program,” said Christian Galvez-Padilla, MD, a BMC surgeon and one of the leaders of the screening program. “We’re finding cancer when it is still early enough to save lives.”

Yet, the small size of the tumor, sometimes buried deep inside lung tissue, made it difficult to biopsy. In 2016, BMC invested in Cone Beam CT which provides three-dimensional imaging of the lung that guides a more precise location of the tumor and yields a better tissue specimen for analysis.

During the procedure, Dr. Galvez also implants a small metal marker so that the tumor can more easily be found during surgery a few days later.

“With this new equipment, the fluoroscopy machine (an X-ray machine augmented with video) rotates 200 degrees around the patient, creating CT-quality images that enable me to see the nodule in three different spheres,” Dr. Galvez said. “This provides far greater accuracy in locating the tumor and retrieving a specimen for analysis.”

But why wait for another day to perform surgery to remove the cancerous tumor? In the last year, following discussions between Dr. Galvez and Anesthesiologist Mark Vanden Bosch, MD, BMC has begun a new practice of performing both the diagnostic bronchoscopy and cancer surgery — if needed — on the same day.

“We wanted to save our patients from two admissions to the hospital, going under anesthesia twice, and two separate procedures,” Dr. Galvez said.

In addition to streamlining the process, Dr. Galvez is also using the next generation da Vinci system, which was recently unveiled by BMC as the latest addition to its surgical robotics program.

“Now that we have our new robot, we’re using it for minimally-invasive lung cancer surgery as well!” Dr. Galvez said. “It provides improved visualization and enables more intricate procedures. All of these advancements have taken our lung cancer screening and treatment program to the next level.”
New algorithm includes quicker administration of epinephrine to avoid trips to the hospital.

At the BMC Cancer Center, patients receiving chemotherapy are given medications that are completely new to their bodies. While these drugs are critical in the treatment of cancer, they also have the potential to cause hypersensitivity reactions. Sometimes, a patient may experience a more severe allergic reaction to chemotherapy.

In the past, these patients would require transport by ambulance to the emergency department where their symptoms were managed. Among the quality improvements instituted at the BMC Cancer Center during 2018 is a new algorithm that details the administration of medications that will ease symptoms of allergic reaction to chemotherapy, as well as the new practice of providing a quicker dose of epinephrine for patients with severe symptoms.

The algorithm was created in collaboration with Kelley Alboeze, RN, BSN, an educator in the BMC Clinical Development Department, under the guidance of the Dana-Farber Cancer Care Collaborative.

"Our goal is to turn the reaction around and stabilize the patient here, avoiding the need for a higher level of medical intervention," said Julie Steinman, RN, BS, OCN, the clinical leader at the BMC Cancer Center.

The new algorithm is a step-by-step guide for nurses to follow when treating patients with hypersensitivity reactions.

"The nurses at the BMC Cancer Center are committed to providing the highest quality of care for their patients, using evidence-based practices," said Elaine Kaliowsky, RN, BSN, OCN, clinical manager. "Early recognition of hypersensitivity reactions is essential for the patient's well-being and can, in some cases save lives. The use of epinephrine has already shown to have positive outcomes, lessening the severity of these reactions and avoiding a trip to the hospital."
A person with cancer is never a burden. Cancer is the burden.

At the BMC Cancer Center, the physicians, nurses, and social worker are all aware of the profound physical and emotional toll that caregiving takes on people. In addition to being the medical provider at home for someone with cancer, they are also running the household, managing the family, and frequently have jobs outside of the home. They sit up at night worrying about their loved ones. They are often exhausted.

“When you hear what caregivers do in a day, you wonder how it is possible,” said Sue Budz, MSW, LICSW, Oncology Social Worker at the BMC Cancer Center. “It can be difficult for caregivers to share their worries with their loved ones, because they do not want their loved one to feel like they are a burden. People with cancer often worry about being a burden to their families. A person with cancer is never a burden. Cancer is the burden.”

To help caregivers find their own support, Sue Budz and Sue Flynn, RN, OCN, staff at the BMC Cancer Center launched Caregiver Connections – a support group for those caring for loved ones with cancer. At weekly meetings, caregivers talk about what it is like to provide care for someone they love. They learn from other’s experiences, share practical tips and offer each other support.

In addition, the group supports caregivers as they find the words to begin the sometimes-difficult conversations between them and their loved one. “We always encourage caregivers to speak with their loved ones so they can best understand what their loved one wants for their treatment and care, as well as for the caregiver to share their needs. These conversations between partners prove so valuable,” she said. “They help bring clarity to an unimaginable situation.”

Budz understands that it can be difficult for those interested in attending the group to come for their initial meeting but has seen time and again the value of that first step.

Caregiver Connections meets every Wednesday at 11am at the BMC Cancer Center. No Registration Required.
BMC CANCER CARE SERVICES & CONTACT NUMBERS

**Berkshire Hematology Oncology:** 413-443-6000
**Radiation Oncology:** 413-447-2461
**Patient Care Navigation Program:** 413-447-3092
Guides patients and families through the cancer care process, access to services, resources and follow-up.

**Women’s Imaging Center:** 413-447-2147
Comprehensive breast health program includes screening, diagnosis and post-treatment support.

**Lung Nodule Clinic:** 413-445-6420 Weekly Wednesday clinic where patients can be evaluated and referred for further consultation.

**Screening Colonoscopies at BMC:** 413-395-7606 Direct open access simplifies scheduling for this life-saving test.

**Fairview Hospital:** 413-854-9616 South county residents can schedule mammograms, screening colonoscopies.

**Berkshire Surgical Services:** 413-445-6420 (Pittsfield)
413-644-6499 (South County)

**Urology Professional Services:** 413-447-2375 (Pittsfield)
413-662-2486 (North County) 413-644-6499 (South County)

**Rehabilitation Services:** 413-445-9353

**Lymphedema Clinic:** 413-443-6000

**Integrative Health Reservation:** 413-395-7992

**Patient Care Funds:** Provide financial assistance for Mammograms 413-447-2147 and Screening Colonoscopies 413-395-7606

*For more information, call the BMC LINK line at 1-855-BMC-LINK (855-262-5465) or visit berkshirehealthsystems.org/cancercare*