Dear Friends,

We all know that the words, “You have cancer,” are some of the most frightening words that any of us can hear. If you are facing a cancer diagnosis, we want you to know that Berkshire Medical Center’s Cancer Center and Infusion Center is here to help you face whatever challenges lie ahead — from the first moments of your illness, through treatment, recovery, and beyond.

Since opening in November of 2013, BMC’s Cancer Center has led the way in cancer care. As a founding member of the Dana-Farber Cancer Care Collaborative, we work closely with Dana-Farber Cancer Institute (DFCI) in Boston to make sure that BMC delivers high quality care right here at the Cancer Center, where patients can remain close to home, friends, and family.

The Cancer Center’s exceptional team of hematologist/oncologists, oncology nurses and nurse practitioners, radiation therapists, care navigators, social workers, integrative health practitioners and nutritionists tirelessly tends to all aspects of a patient’s needs — physical, emotional, and practical — with compassion and skill.

Each of the stories in this publication features a new way that BMC’s Cancer Center is working to make each patient experience the best it can be. For example, in the past year, we have instituted new protocols to improve patient care, upgraded critical medical records technology, and developed an innovative new program called Moving Forward, to provide support for cancer survivors after treatment.

We are incredibly proud of our Cancer Center care team, our state-of-the-art treatment technology, and our ability to deliver the best possible outcomes for patients, right here in the Berkshires. So, if you or your loved one hears those dreaded words, “You have cancer,” please remember that BMC’s Cancer Center is with you every step of the way.

Sincerely,

David E. Phelps
President & CEO
Berkshire Health Systems

Every year, hundreds of our friends and neighbors depend on the team at BMC’s Cancer Center. Our goal is to offer each patient the highest level of cancer care and help them return to their lives.

We are dedicated to patient-centered care delivered by physicians and nurse practitioners, and enhanced by a full range of specialists in social work and integrative therapies.

Our membership in the Dana-Farber Cancer Care Collaborative enables us to combine the very latest in cancer breakthroughs with locally-based compassionate care for our patients and their loved ones.
Moving Forward

What just happened to me?
Am I going to be OK?
How do I live with this fear and anxiety?
Wait! What is that new pain?
Will my next scan show something?

These are just some of the questions that can consume cancer survivors once they’ve completed treatment. After weeks or months of tests, chemotherapy, side effects and constant worry, many feel overwhelmed by the whirlwind that followed their cancer diagnosis. It’s hard to settle back into their previous lives – even if the prognosis is great.

In 2019, the BMC Cancer Center launched a new addition to its Integrative Health Program that is providing tools to help cancer patients manage their health and ease their anxieties. Called Moving Forward, the six-week course provides a forum where participants explore the physical and emotional changes that often accompany a cancer diagnosis, as well as life after treatment.

“When people have completed their treatment, patients themselves, family, friends and co-workers want their lives to go back to the way it was before,” said Sue Budz, MSW, LICSW, OSW-C Oncology Social Worker at the BMC Cancer Center. “Yet, many patients continue to deal with fairly significant physical and emotional needs. Additionally, they may have residual symptoms and side effects from their treatment that continue to have tremendous impact.”

It’s a lot to handle. The Moving Forward program enables participants to learn effective new ways of reclaiming their lives while surrounded by people facing the same challenges.

The course is grounded in the pillars of Integrative Health – mindfulness, movement and nutrition. Moving Forward begins with a general information class and the introduction of mindfulness techniques. Subsequent classes focus on exercise, emotional health, nutrition, acupuncture and reiki. The final class is devoted to reviewing the tools they’ve developed over the past five weeks and how to use them in their daily lives.

Each class includes a piece of scientific evidence, followed by a practice that is based on that finding. For example, the class on nutrition will include information about calcium and bone health after treatment, as well as a cooking demonstration that provides easy and tasty ways to achieve nutritional goals.

BMC’s new Integrative Health Program helps cancer survivors adjust to life after treatment.

From left, Michelle Nash, MS, RD, LDN, Trevor Bayliss, MD & Sue Budz, MSW, LICSW, OSW-C

The course leaders are tracking the impact of the program with scientifically validated surveys. “We’re finding some pretty significant results,” Budz said. “A number of areas that the participants had identified as distressing are improving, and the anecdotal feedback is very supportive.”

The BMC Cancer Center offers the course three times a year, and it’s open to patients who have completed active treatment. Some of the participants are cancer-free, while some are living with cancer. In addition, the Center offers a follow-up class twice a year where participants are invited back to refresh their skills.

“One of the most common observations by the participants is that they feel less alone after the course,” Budz said. “They understand that it’s OK to make time every day to take care of themselves – that they’re not being selfish. We talk a lot about self-kindness and compassion.”

Budz noted that, for many patients, the BMC Cancer Center played a major role in their lives during a very difficult time. “They want to stay connected with us, and we don’t want to lose touch with them,” she said.
Every cancer patient in treatment today is benefiting from clinical trials of the past. And the research continues with thousands of clinical trials underway right now that aim to uncover even better ways of preventing, diagnosing, and treating cancer and managing its symptoms.

BMC Cancer Center patients are among thousands of others with the disease who are on the front lines of clinical trials. The results will advance cancer care – possibly for themselves and definitely for patients of the future.

Jessica Ziemek, MPH, the Certified Clinical Research Coordinator at the BMC Cancer Center, said that many patients are eager to be part of studies. “They understand that they have an opportunity to help another patient who may someday have their particular form of cancer,” she said.

The BMC Cancer Center’s membership in the Dana-Farber Cancer Care Collaborative gives patients access to studies carried out by one of the world’s leading cancer research hospitals, while sparing them the inconvenience of traveling back and forth to Boston. Patients also have access to clinical trials sponsored by the National Cancer Institute through BMC Cancer Center’s membership in NRG Oncology – a non-profit research organization formed to conduct oncology clinical research – as well as important studies taking place right here at BMC.

“These kinds of collaborations enable our patients to participate in a broad range of studies and treatments,” she said. Part of Ziemek’s role at the BMC Cancer Center is to screen all new patients for eligibility for clinical trials, make sure they are aware of the clinical trials, and work with them to gain access if they meet the criteria.

“The Commission on Cancer lists participating in clinical trials as a priority,” she said. “Patients should always be considered for a trial so that knowledge about treatment and other aspects of the disease will continue to expand. To meet our Commission on Cancer standard, four percent of all new cancer patients diagnosed here go on to studies.”

The clinical trials cover a range of research projects now on the drawing board, including new cancer drugs seeking approval, or studies that evaluate the merits of adding a second drug to a treatment regimen to improve results. Some patients participate in trials that study how lifestyle changes impact recovery, and much more. Once enrolled in a study, patients can be followed for 10 years or longer.

Ziemek also noted that participating in a clinical trial does not mean that more traditional therapy has failed. “Clinical studies are not always the last option for a patient,” she said. “Some of the research is focused on types of cancer that have great cure rates, but studies help us to better understand and treat the disease. Important clinical research may require as little as a providing a blood specimen, all the way to piloting a new drug.”

“Patients should always be considered for a trial so that knowledge about treatment and other aspects of the disease will continue to expand.”
Electronic Teamwork

The BMC Cancer Center does an excellent job of keeping its patients out of the Emergency Department (ED) or hospital. For the vast majority of patients, the Cancer Center’s caregivers can treat pain, illness and other side effects of therapy at their own facility. But from time to time, a patient gets sick on a weekend or holiday, and a trip to the ED becomes necessary.

That event can trigger multiple phone calls between the ED physician, the Cancer Center’s oncologist, and even the patient’s primary care physician, as they work together to diagnose the reason for the patient’s visit and agree on the most appropriate treatment.

These conversations are necessary because the BMC Cancer Center, BHS physician practices, and BHS hospitals each have their own electronic health record (EHR). Thus, the ED physician does not have quick access to information that perhaps the patient just began a new medication with the potential to cause the same symptoms that prompted the emergency visit.

All this is about to change – and much more. Berkshire Health Systems is in the final stages of creating a new EHR that will consolidate vital patient information from three separate electronic health records into one. Called EXPANSE, the new system will update patient data in real time, no matter what BHS setting is providing the care.

“We always had all of the necessary information about our patients,” said Aaron Crow, operations director at the BMC Cancer Center. “But because it was located in three different records – and we only had access to one – our providers had to update the Cancer Center’s EHR manually every time they saw our patients. EXPANSE will provide a much more efficient way for all caregivers to work together as a team.”

Other EXPANSE benefits will be a more streamlined system for patient intake into the hematology oncology practice, greater capacity for ordering chemotherapy, lab work and imaging, and a more efficient system for the Cancer Center to report its quality scores.

And for the first time, BMC Cancer Center patients will have access to the Berkshire Patient Portal – a secure, online resource accessed from the BHS website, where they can review results of their own labs, tests, and instructions for follow-up care.

Studies prove that patients who have access to their own health information form stronger partnerships with their physicians and nurses and are more engaged in working toward healthier outcomes.

“Access to information is vitally important for our patients,” Crow observed. “With EXPANSE and the Berkshire Patient Portal, they will be able to retrieve their information when and where they want.”

The BMC Cancer Center is part of the Berkshire Health Systems initiative to create one electronic health record to enhance patient safety and care.

2019 Report on Cancer

EXPANSE will enable caregivers to work more efficiently as a team.
Quality Improvements

Early recognition and treatment of sepsis
Sepsis can be a life-threatening illness caused by the body’s reaction to an infection, which can occur in some patients receiving cancer treatment. In 2019, the BMC Cancer Center implemented a new protocol to embed sepsis best practices into routine care for infusion patients receiving chemotherapy. These best practices allow caregivers to recognize early symptoms of the condition, enabling earlier treatment.

The new protocol includes a guideline-based nursing flow-sheet. The patient's symptoms must meet two sets of criteria to be ruled-in on the sepsis flow-sheet. Once the criteria for sepsis are met, the nursing staff can provide early treatment such as drawing blood, initiating IV fluids and starting antibiotic treatment – all before transporting the patient for further evaluation to the Emergency Department.

Pregnancy screening for women receiving chemotherapy or hormone therapy
“Is there a chance you may be pregnant?” It’s a very important question. Cancer treatments have the potential to harm a developing fetus, and even though fertility can be compromised during cancer care, pregnancy is possible.

As the result of a 2019 quality study at the BMC Cancer Center, all women of childbearing age are now screened for pregnancy before treatment. In addition, providers have received education on accurate pregnancy screening, and nurse practitioners are now including information about the need for screening and contraception during consultations with their female cancer patients.

Monitoring bone health for women prescribed aromatase inhibitor
Some women with invasive endocrine positive breast cancer are prescribed an aromatase inhibitor (AI) – a therapy that is associated with a decrease in bone mineral density and can put our patients at risk for bone fractures.

A quality study at the BMC Cancer Center resulted in a new protocol that creates a process for bone mineral density testing before the start of an aromatase inhibitor, as well as patient education that explains the need for testing and continued monitoring of bone health during and after AI.

New protocols at the BMC Cancer Center continue to advance the highest quality of care in 2019.

Each year, the American College of Surgeon’s Commission on Cancer (CoC) requires that cancer programs publicly report on specific cancer quality improvement and accountability measures. Berkshire Medical Center continues to produce outcome results that meet or exceed the CoC’s estimated performance rate.

### Quality Improvement Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cancer Site</th>
<th>Commission on Cancer Standard</th>
<th>BMC Cancer Center Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BREAST</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLON</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECTAL</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
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### Accountability Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cancer Site</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Commission on Cancer Standard</th>
<th>BMC Cancer Center Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BREAST</td>
<td>Tamoxifen or third generation aromatase inhibitor is considered or administered within 1 year of diagnosis for women with AJCC T1c or stage II or stage III hormone receptor positive breast cancer.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>95%*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combination chemotherapy is recommended or administered within 4 months of diagnosis for women under 70 with AJCC T1a-N0, or stage IB - III hormone receptor negative breast cancer.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radiation is administered within 1 year of diagnosis for women under the age of 70 receiving breast conservation surgery for breast cancer.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>87%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLON</td>
<td>Adjuvant chemotherapy is recommended, or administered within 4 months of diagnosis for patients under the age of 80 with Stage III (lymph node positive) colon cancer.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One patient is still receiving treatment
**Three patients opted for hormones as treatment and one patient moved away
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 and screening colonoscopies.

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

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

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

**Lymphedema Clinic:** 413-447-2244

**Integrative Health Reservation:** 413-997-5882

**Patient Care Funds:** Provide financial assistance for mammograms 413-447-2147 and screening colonoscopies 413-395-7606

**BMC Cancer Center Research Office:** 413-496-8205

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