

## Cancer Care Associates of Fresno



### An example of Clinical Best Practices among medium-size practices

"Cancer Care Associates of Fresno (CCA) was originally a single specialty medical oncology group of three that started in 1992," said Michael Moffett, MD and CEO of CCA. "For years, CCA was engaged in a relationship with a local hospital and acted as the medical oncology department of a hospital-based cancer center. During a physician retreat in 2003, the physicians and administrative staff of CCA committed themselves to the goal of providing academic level of cancer care in a comforting, community based setting. Key to this goal was the development of a comprehensive center to allow for the integration of multiple disciplines."

CCA is the recipient of the 2009 HOPE award as the best example of a medium-sized practice in the category of Clinical Best Practices among this year's entrants. By 2005, CCA grew to seven medical oncologists and ran out of space at the hospital-based site. They began to explore building their own comprehensive cancer center. Although there were significant challenges related to reimbursement, they felt this was necessary in order to maintain their mission and vision: *To be the leaders in the delivery of compassionate and advanced care in the treatment of cancer and blood related disorders.* "We take our mission very seriously," Moffett said. "Our mission is an outward proclamation of our desire to proactively and progressively provide only the best, most state-of-the-art cancer treatment possible. Fresno has a dedicated team of oncologists who can provide big-city care – we want our community to see and believe that."

As tangible evidence of that commitment, in December of 2006, CCA moved into a 32,000-square-foot comprehensive cancer center. The new facility allowed it to expand its services to patients by adding imaging and physician dispensing. In August 2008, CCA opened a new radiation oncology facility featuring the Varian RapidArc Linear Accelerator. With the integration of this program, patients can now receive the complete spectrum of cancer services under one roof.

"We believe that cancer treatment is more than just medicine," said Maria Madrigal Shaffer, the executive director of CCA. "It's about compassion, prevention, research and wellness. Even though cancer treatment requires medical intervention, it's our belief that a strong will and a solid support-group play a vital role in the healing process. Our expert team of board-certified oncologists, hematologists, nurses and other highly-skilled cancer care professionals work together closely with our patients and their loved ones throughout the course of recovery. It's this compassionate approach, combined with our state-of-the-art facilities, comfortable environment and commitment to implementing the most advanced treatment techniques available that make us Central California's premier oncology center."

"We strive to use research, utilization management, our EMR, safety guidelines and other clinical practices to provide (along with our technology, treatment plans and integrative approach) clinical excellence. We are careful to steer CCA in a direction that promotes only what is clinically the best alternative of medicine for our patients," said Shaffer.

"For our employees we envision and strive to provide a safe work environment where their skill and talent is challenged and nurtured for success," said Moffett. "We hope to engage our employees in the mission of our practice with the goal in mind that they, too, would feel able to shape and influence the lives of our patients."

"We are only as good as the employees who work for us," Shaffer said. "Happy employees translate into a positive message of hope and healing for our patients – again a core piece of who we strive to be. We also host regular customer service programs to educate our staff on the importance of interaction with our patients. We stress the context of our interactions as well as their quality. Understanding our patients' expectations and states of mind is important to excel in our service to them."

“Our most recent investment was related to our radiation oncology program,” Moffett said. “The radiation therapy equipment at CCA is the latest, most state-of-the-art radiation therapy technology developed by Varian Medical Systems. Our Varian iX machine is equipped with Intensity-Modulation-Radiation-Therapy (IMRT). CCA is the first cancer center in the greater Fresno community to offer Image-guided Radiation Therapy (IGRT). Additionally, we have invested in the new RapidArc feature for Linear accelerators like ours. Dr. Jedidiah Monson, our radiation oncologist, joined CCA in January 2008 as the director of the new radiation oncology department. He believes that patients greatly benefit when their care providers work closely together and strongly supports fully integrated cancer care.”

### Utilization management – Standardization of care

The utilization of clinical guidelines help standardize care and improve safety. “Our physicians meet bi-monthly to discuss both business and clinical issues,” Shaffer said. “Each month, the physicians share research and best practice examples of clinical approaches in order to gain consensus and standardization in our practice. Once this consensus is reached, the decision is adopted by integrating it into our organization through education of clinical and business staff as well as into our EMR.”

Shaffer offered the following explanation of how their gamble to establish a full service treatment center in a “rural” setting paid off: “A patient presents with a new neurological symptom, is assessed by the medical oncologist and treated for symptoms in the infusion area. A CT head scan is arranged the same day in the radiology department, and the patient is found to have new CNS metastasis.”

“The patient receives a rapid diagnosis of the problem at one site. The physician wins by getting an answer in a timely fashion without the hassles of arranging follow up and has direct contact with the treating rad-onc.” Moffett said. “The payer wins by avoiding costly ER and potential hospitalization all with improved patient satisfaction.”

### Electronic Medical Records

CCA adopted the Varian medical oncology EMR in 2005, and ARIA for radiation oncology was implemented in 2007. Shaffer and Moffett said they expect CCA to be fully integrated with ARIA’s Comprehensive Clinical Solutions interface by the summer of 2009. The EMR will then function as a seamless electronic system between medical and radiation oncology. “We are currently developing a simple data collection tool, which allows treatment outcomes data to be captured and reported,” Shaffer said. “This will be used as a resource in discussing cost effective treatment approaches with payers and negotiating contracts. We feel excellence in clinical best practices requires a uniform commitment from our entire team to participate and support our efforts.”



▲ Jedidiah Monson, MD, radiation oncologist.

### Participation in Clinical Research

All oncology patients are screened for clinical trials. “We expect to enroll over 140 patients in 2009,” Moffett said. “Emphasis is on cooperative group trials. All RNs are expected to be OCN certified.” CCA is a member of NCCTG (North Central Cancer Treatment Group affiliate through The Mayo Clinic), and ION (International Oncology Network). They are currently involved in clinical trials concerning breast cancer, colorectal cancer, head and neck cancers, lung cancer and ovarian cancer, as well as studies focusing on pain control and sleep improvement.

“At CCA, we believe in the power of cancer research and the hope it gives to millions of patients worldwide,” said Steven Hager, DO, and research director for CCA. “We have more patients involved with national and pharmaceutical clinical trials than any other cancer treatment center in the central valley. We proactively chose not to stand back and wait for a solution; but instead chose to be a part of the solution.”

This is how progress occurs, he said, “by proactive participation in trials which give us some hope and some answers as we work towards an answer together. The clinical trials we participate in here cover a broad spectrum of diagnosis and include cancer, non-cancer, prevention and symptom management studies. We feel that our affiliations with world-renowned research institutions are an example of our commitment to innovative, state-of-the-art treatment.”

The trials not only have a direct benefit on CCA’s patients’ health, but deliver positive results, which can be shared and utilized in clinics worldwide, he said. “We are also able to provide our pharmaceutical sponsors and our industry with findings and details on populations otherwise not represented – such as Asian, Hispanic and even African American,” Hager said. “It is our quest to continually strive to reduce the number of cancer patients, deliver the most advanced forms of procedures, and promote novel approaches to ongoing treatment. We feel that this is a means of influencing and impacting the next generation and as mentioned above, to do our part in making progress happen.”