



Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology
“Caring for the whole person”

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For Immediate Release

Cancer Patients in Communities throughout Massachusetts Now Eligible for Cutting-Edge Clinical Trials

Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology Only Practice in State Selected by NCI

Quincy, Mass—Patients undergoing cancer treatments can now participate in cutting-edge clinical trials never before available. Susan A. Sajer, MD, a medical oncologist with Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology (CHO)—the largest private practice cancer care network in New England—has been selected to head CHO’s newly launched clinical trials program in conjunction with the National Cancer Institute’s (NCI) Independent Clinical Research Site Program. The program is part of NCI’s Cancer Trials Support Unit, which oversees NCI’s clinical trials (research studies that evaluate effectiveness of new cancer treatments).

The program will benefit hundreds of local patients who find it inconvenient or impossible to travel to downtown medical centers, where the majority of cutting-edge clinical trials typically occur.

This new relationship between NCI and CHO gives more patients faster access to 60 leading cancer trials. These are the same trials that patients receive at internationally renowned cancer centers such as Sloan Kettering and Massachusetts General Hospital, according to Dr. Sajer.

“We want patients to have improved access to better treatment options that are closer to home, in smaller, community-based sites. This enables us to do so,” says Dr. Sager, who has implemented hundreds of clinical trials, with many leading to FDA-approved cancer therapies. “Clinical trials are a hope for the future. Eligible patients can participate in a study, and if it’s a home-run, they can help many other community residents as well as the next generation.”

Dr. Sager, one of 25 CHO physicians, will oversee this program throughout CHO’s multiple sites in Massachusetts. She is hiring staff to carry out the trials, follow NCI regulations, and work with CHO’s data managers to report findings to NCI.

“NCI created this program to make it easier for community cancer care practices like ours to do clinical trials and reach more patients with the newest treatments being studied nationwide,” says Walt Kagan, MD, PhD, president of CHO.

“While our offices have been involved with clinical trials for many years, we had relied on local hospitals to do the regulatory work,” explains Dr. Kagan. “But that could take six months to be approved, and by then, the studies might be closed. Now, our relationship with NCI allows CHO to be approved as an independent entity outside the hospitals, providing us with one central regulatory body. This is very exciting and significant because it gives us immediate access to the newest trials, which is how we learn that one drug is more effective than an existing one.”

He adds, “Our hope is to promote patients’ quality of life. Another benefit is that patients who participate will help many others and also advance our knowledge about potentially curative treatments.”

The trials will be available for patients undergoing treatment for a wide range of diseases, including colorectal, lung, and prostate cancer, and lymphoma. Depending on

the patients' needs, the trials may involve chemotherapy, targeted therapies, radiation treatments, hormones, and surgery. Most will be "Phase III" trials, or those that compare new medicines to existing, standard, state-of-the art treatments.

Jenny Hopkins, RN, BSN, Program Manager for CICRS, says CHO was the only Massachusetts practice selected for the study because of its large network and reputation for top-quality community cancer care. "CHO will bring the trials under one umbrella to its many community offices. This will simplify matters so all CHO sites will have access to a single trial," she says. "People west, north, and south of Boston will no longer have to get into Boston to participate in these trials."

"Our program will improve efficiency and contain costs," says Dr. Sajer, who has hired clinical nurse specialists, an office manager, and data managers to implement this program. Some staff will be based at CHO's Concord office at Emerson Hospital's John Cummings Building; others will work throughout CHO's multiple locations.

Drs. Sajer and Kagan encourage interested patients to inquire about this program through their physician and to visit www.chomed.com.

The CICRS program began in 2002 and has enrolled nearly 800 patients in 49 sites nationwide.

CHO, based in Quincy, Mass., has offices and clinical sites throughout the state, and it is the largest private practice cancer care network in New England. Known for its leadership in community-based cancer care, CHO has been caring for patients for three decades. It was the first group practice in the state to develop treatment guidelines for specific cancers and the first group practice in the area to develop a computerized software program for chemotherapy ordering as well as a patient advocacy program. CHO's 25 physicians see up to 30,000 new patients a year, and this number is expected to increase with this program. For more information, visit www.chomed.com.

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