

# M.D. NEWS

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COMMONWEALTH ATRIUS  
CANCER CENTER



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## New Facility Offers Convenient, State-of-the-Art Cancer Care to Patients on the South Shore

By Kathryn J. Siranosian, M.S.

These days, there's plenty of "buzz" about the need for more community-based cancer care in Massachusetts. In fact, last year, state health officials took the unprecedented step of specifically calling for more local access to cancer care facilities — and soon. Factoring in the state's sizeable graying baby boomer population, these researchers predict that doctors will diagnose a whopping 38,248 residents with cancer in 2010 — that's an 18% increase above the number of new cases diagnosed in 2000.

But talk to physicians from two of the South Shore's health care powerhouses — Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology P.C. (CHO) and Atrius Health — and they'll tell you there's nothing new about advocating for community-based patient care. In fact, physicians from both groups have been devoted

to that very principle for nearly 30 years (see inset).

Now, CHO and Atrius Health have stepped up their commitment to community-based patient care even more. The two have joined forces to open the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center at 51 Performance Drive in Weymouth. This new, 22,254-square-foot facility offers patients state-of-the-art, ambulatory medical oncology, cutting-edge radiation oncology, and other ancillary services — all under one roof, and all close to home for patients on the South Shore.

What's more, the new collaboration between Atrius Health and CHO means that patients receive cancer care that's seamlessly integrated with the care that they receive from their primary care physician.

"From the start, CHO and Atrius Health had a very clear vision," says Walt Kagan, M.D., Ph.D., President of CHO. "First, we knew there was definitely a need for more radiation therapy (on the South Shore). And, then, we wanted to enhance the level of care and provide more for our patients in the local community setting. Our vision for this center is not just about radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Our vision is that we'll have a whole menu of special services that cancer patients need and that will be easily accessible."

Essentially, that vision is guided by a simple philosophy, a fundamental belief that



PHOTO BY FRED DELOREY

**CHO's Weymouth oncologists in their new location. L-R: Michael Anderson, M.D.; Anne Roberge, M.D.; Carol Mei, M.D.; and James Everett, M.D. Not shown: Thomas O'Connor, Jr., M.D.**

the patient comes first, explains Jeffrey Levin-Scherz, M.D., MBA, who serves as Chief Medical Officer of both Atrius Health and Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates.

“We recognized that there was a real need for patients on the South Shore,” he says. “We knew that our patients would often have to brave traffic to go elsewhere to get care, and that there was a real desire in the medical community to have high-quality, integrated medical and radiation oncology available close by. CHO is a very highly regarded group. It has an excellent reputation, and they share our vision that the patient comes first. So, really they are a natural partner for Atrius Health.”

## CANCER CARE THAT'S STATE-OF-THE-ART, COMPREHENSIVE, AND CONVENIENT

The Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center offers the latest in advanced **chemotherapy** treatments, including infusions, injections, hydration, and additional supportive care. During their treatments, patients receive personalized, one-on-one care in newly constructed patient areas that were specifically designed to be welcoming and comfortable.

“The nurses are attentive to patients for the whole time they are here, making sure the treatment is going well and addressing any potential side effects or concerns,” says board-certified medical oncologist James R. Everett, M.D., Senior Medical Oncologist at the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center. “And, the new treatment areas are very patient-friendly, bright, with lots of natural light. Patients tell me that this is a wonderful place to come to. They’ve always been comfortable coming to CHO for treatment and comfortable with their relationship with the doctors and nurses, but now there’s a more comfortable environment, too, which is important.”

Dr. Everett, who was one of the area’s first community-based medical oncologists, has been practicing in Weymouth for the past 30 years. He says that the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center offers patients on the South Shore an entirely new level of comprehensive — and convenient — cancer care.

“It’s our vision that our medical oncology practice, along with the radiation oncology and other additional support services, will allow us to provide comprehensive care to our patients. The space here will allow us to achieve those goals,” Dr. Everett says, adding that there are plans for the center to include ancillary services, such as offices for related subspecialists and perhaps a wig specialist (for patients who lose their hair during treatment).

Of course, comprehensive cancer care also means being able to offer patients the most advanced treatment possible for their

## Cutting-Edge Technology Enhances Precision of Radiation Therapy

The Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center is the first facility on the South Shore with the capabilities to treat certain cancers with state-of-the-art, 4-D CT treatment planning and respiratory gating.

While it’s now routine to individualize radiation therapy based on the three-dimensional aspects of a tumor, the radiation oncology team at the center can now use 4-D CT treatment planning to add a “time element” (the fourth dimension) to the treatment plan for certain cancers. As a result, the team can account for the regular movements of the body during breathing and design a sophisticated treatment plan that applies the radiation dose to the tumor when — and only when — it’s precisely in the right location. When the target moves out of position, the radiation beam instantaneously shuts off, sparing normal tissue. This technology, called “gating,” can be particularly beneficial for patients with lung cancer.



PHOTO BY DEBRA TROYANOS

### Radiation oncology technicians provide treatments with pinpoint accuracy.

“Each time the patient breathes in and out, the tumor in the lung moves,” explains Dr. Fung, Director of Radiation Oncology at the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center. “If the beam is fixed, part of the time the tumor will move out of the beam and part of the time it will move back in. The old-fashioned way to get around that was to make the beam much wider to encompass that entire excursion. Now, when we do the 4-D CT planning scan, we can capture the different phases of respiration and transmit that information to the treatment unit. The beam will only turn on when the tumor is in the beam. When the tumor moves out of the beam, the machine turns off.”

The combination of 4-D CT treatment planning and respiratory gating allows the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center radiation oncology team to aim high, curative doses of IMRT precisely at the tumor, while sparing surrounding healthy tissue. This new technology is designed to improve outcomes, while reducing side effects of radiation therapy, Dr. Fung says.

disease. Through the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center, patients on the South Shore now have easy access to a wide range of state-of-the-art **clinical trials**. In fact, Dr. Kagan proudly reports that the National Cancer Institute (NCI) recently selected CHO as one of only six practices in the nation to be accepted this year in a pilot program designed to improve community access to clinical trials.

“Because CHO was chosen to participate in this pilot program, we’ll be able to offer well over 50 national clinical trials approved by NCI,” Dr. Kagan says. “It’s really going to be a dramatic breakthrough for patients on the South Shore.”

In addition to advanced chemotherapy



**Patients have easy access to integrated imaging services.**



PHOTOS BY DEBRA TROYANOS

**The CHO Infusion Room puts patients at ease.**

and clinical trials, the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center also offers the latest in **radiation oncology**, licensed by Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates.

The center’s new linear accelerator is among the area’s first to include a built-in CT scanner. This integration of CT with intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) allows the radiation oncology team to monitor the location of a tumor on a daily basis, while the patient is positioned on the treatment table. A quick CT scan detects even the small micro-movements that are typical of internal organs, so that the IMRT beam can be adjusted accordingly.

“The CT scanner allows real-time, three-dimensional imaging with the patient in the treatment position,” explains board-certified radiation oncologist Claire Y. Fung, M.D., the Director of Radiation Oncology at the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center. “So, right before we turn the beam on, we can verify that the patient is aligned the way we intend. Even if they’re aligned properly based on external body marks, sometimes there are internal shifts. The prostate is a good example. From day to day, it can actually shift, based on things like how relaxed the patient is, bowel patterns, what they ate. If you just rely on bony landmarks, you’ll never see those shifts, but if you take a CT scan, then the machine will make the adjustment and realign the beam.”

This sophisticated “on-board imaging” allows the radiation oncology team to combine noninvasive image-guided radiation therapy (IGRT) with enhanced IMRT. As a result, they

can now aim curative doses more directly and precisely at the cancer cells only, so there's less risk to nearby healthy tissues and organs. This technology is particularly effective in the treatment of prostate, head, neck and brain tumors, and is now also used for certain breast and gastrointestinal cancers, as well.

"We can be much more precise in localizing the tumor, and we don't need as wide a grey zone around the target," Dr. Fung says. "Because of that, we can improve quality, reduce side effects, and also increase the dose."

The Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center will also offer 4-D conformal radiation therapy (see inset), as well as on-site PET/CT imaging. Based on the same principles as on-board imaging, PET/CT imaging allows the radiation oncology team to fuse functional data directly into the treatment planning process. Then, the radiation beam can be precisely directed at the cancerous target, sparing normal tissue.

## CANCER CARE THAT'S INTEGRATED WITH PRIMARY CARE

More than 150,000 Atrius Health patients live in southeastern Massachusetts. In addition to advanced chemotherapy, state-of-the-art clinical trials and cutting-edge radiation oncology modalities, the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center also provides these patients with care that's fully integrated with the health care they receive from their primary care physicians. Physicians at both Atrius Health and CHO are collaborating on the use of an electronic medical record, so that information can flow seamlessly between cancer care doctors and primary care physicians.

"Patients within Atrius Health practices on the South Shore will be able to get care locally, and their doctors will be able to get prompt information, whether it's from medical oncologists or radiation oncologists," Dr. Levin-Scherz says.

Dr. Kagan agrees. "It's very important that all of the doctors taking care of a patient are working together, that they're communicating, that they're discussing, that they're achieving consensus — and that's not just the cancer doctors. The primary care physician is a very important part of the patient's cancer care," he says. "They know everything about the patient. They have the relationship with the patient and the patient's family. They understand the home situation and all of the other medical problems and issues. Teamwork is really key to giving the best care to the patient, and we're committed to that. We're community doctors, and we work with primary care physicians and all the patient's other physicians — their local urologist, their local cardiologist, their local diabetes special-

## Project Brings Together Two Pioneers in New England Health Care

**Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology (CHO)**, based in Quincy, is New England's largest private practice cancer care network.

Over the past 30 years, CHO physicians have expanded to office locations throughout suburban Massachusetts, and the group is now recognized as a national model for community-based cancer care. CHO was the state's first group practice to develop treatment guidelines for specific cancers, the first to develop a computerized software program for chemotherapy ordering, and the first community practice to provide a free patient advocacy program.

Today, CHO's medical oncologists-hematologists, nurse practitioners, and oncology nurses treat more than 7,000 new patients each year.

**Atrius Health** (formerly HealthOne Care System) is an alliance of five community-based medical groups:

- Dedham Medical Associates
- Granite Medical
- Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates
- South Shore Medical Center
- Southboro Medical Group

The extensive network employs about 4,600 people, including more than 700 physicians and 1,000 other health professionals. Overall, they care for nearly 600,000 patients throughout eastern Massachusetts.

Each medical group in the Atrius Health alliance serves its own patients, but they also work together to bring a broader range of integrated services to the communities they serve. For instance, by the end of 2007, all Atrius Health groups will share one electronic medical record system, allowing patients to easily access the wide range of specialists and diagnostic services available throughout the network.

Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center will have access to this electronic medical record system, ensuring that Atrius Health patients will receive cancer care that's fully integrated with the health care they receive from their primary care physician.

ists. We all need to cooperate and communicate efficiently in order to give the patient the best care."

For board-certified internist Edward W. Nalband, M.D., the Medical Director of South Shore Medical Center, the new collaboration between Atrius Health and CHO solidifies clinical relationships that have been in place for decades.

"We, as clinicians, have been sending patients to CHO for years, so there's a lot of trust and respect," he explains. "We have also seen many patients who have ended up going into

Boston. It's difficult for us to maintain contact with those patients, and it's difficult for the patients, too. What Atrius Health is trying to do is make care easier for patients. If we can eliminate the need for them to travel into Boston, particularly during their treatments, which can often make them feel quite sick, that's a good thing. Most patients would rather receive their care in the community, than in a setting where every trip there is a challenge."

Atrius Health patients on the South Shore will also benefit from the advanced diagnostic imaging services planned for the center, Dr. Nalband adds. Even patients who need a routine CT scan can take advantage of the convenient Weymouth location — and have their imaging data reported seamlessly to their primary care physician.

The Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center is the only facility in the area to offer this level of integration for Atrius Health primary care physicians. To Dr. Fung, this communication and cooperation is just another example of how the center strives to put patients first.

"Yes, the field we work in is competitive, and we always take pride in the



PHOTO BY DEBRA TROYANOS

**Dr. Suraj Bowry, Director of Medical Imaging, and James Haeffner, Administrator for Laboratory and Imaging, at the new Atrius Health imaging suite operated by Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates.**

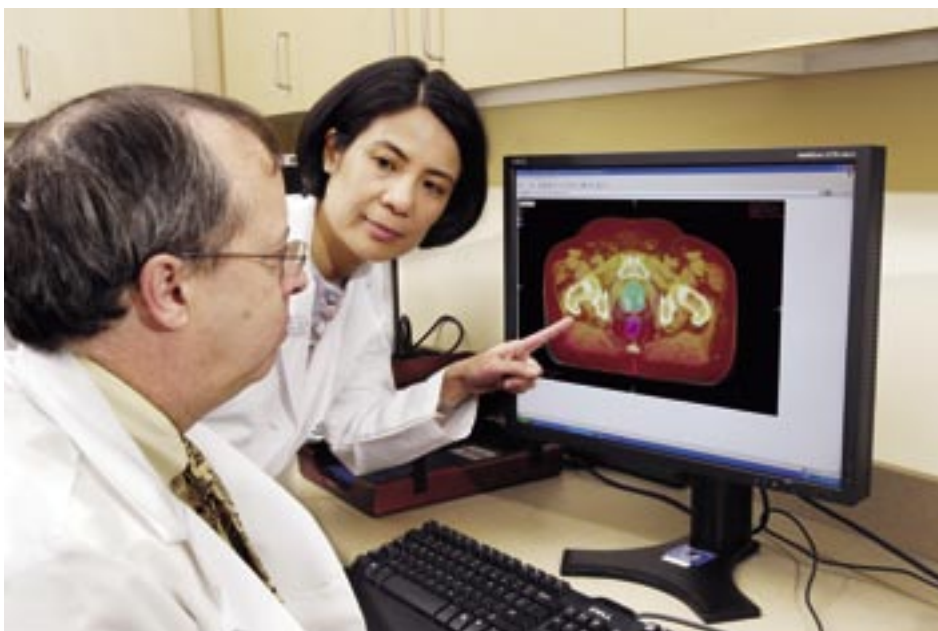


PHOTO BY FRED DELOREY

**Sophisticated treatment planning is key in radiation therapy.**

technology. But, that's almost the easy part. If you have the capital, you can get the technology," she says. "It's the people behind the technology who make the difference. What distinguishes us is that we are a physician organization, and our motto has always been 'Patient care comes first.' The technology is a necessary ingredient, but first and foremost, it's the care and the compassion. People on the South Shore can come here and know that they're getting state-of-the-art care from a staff that really puts the patient first." ■