

Cancer Care Updates:

FROM ACROSS THE PATIENT JOURNEY



From left: Lori Somerville, Pharmacy Technician, Dr. Michael Levesque, Chief of Oncology, Laura White, Registration Clerk, Khadija Al-Harazi, Clinical Trial Coordinator and Brooklyn Battison, Registered Nurse

Message from Walker Family Cancer Centre Leadership

*Dr. Michael Levesque, Chief of Oncology
Tracy Fazzari, Director of Oncology and Palliative Care, 3B Inpatient (interim)*

Over the past year, the Walker Family Cancer Centre (WFCC) has focused on transformative advancements to benefit patients in the Niagara region, including significant upgrades to its radiation program and improvements in hospital care transitions for oncology patients.

The oncology team worked to enhance cancer care throughout the patients' care journeys within Niagara Health and the community.

In alignment with recommendations from Ontario Health and Accreditation Canada, we collaborated with the Medicine Program to improve the transitions of care for patients admitted to hospital. The administrative and physician leadership teams focused on the patient experience, quality of care and criteria surrounding both admissions and discharges. The goal was for all patients with a medical oncology

diagnosis to receive their care on one unit with expert care providers.

This past year has also shown remarkable advancement within the radiation program which embarked on the replacement of all major equipment. As a part of the five-year plan for cancer care delivery set out by Ontario Health (OH), the entire fleet of linear accelerators, which deliver radiation treatment, and the treatment planning system which manages the plan of care, will be replaced by state-of-the-art equipment and software. These enhancements will improve the quality of care provided and allow the program to be more efficient and sustainable.

None of this would be possible without the dedication, commitment and hard work of the frontline team who continue to prioritize providing exceptional care to patients throughout these changes.



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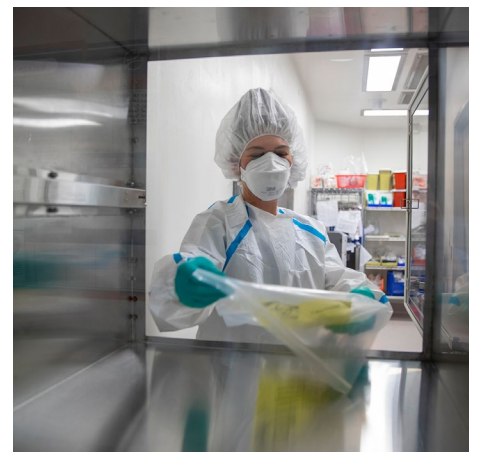
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Radiation Medicine

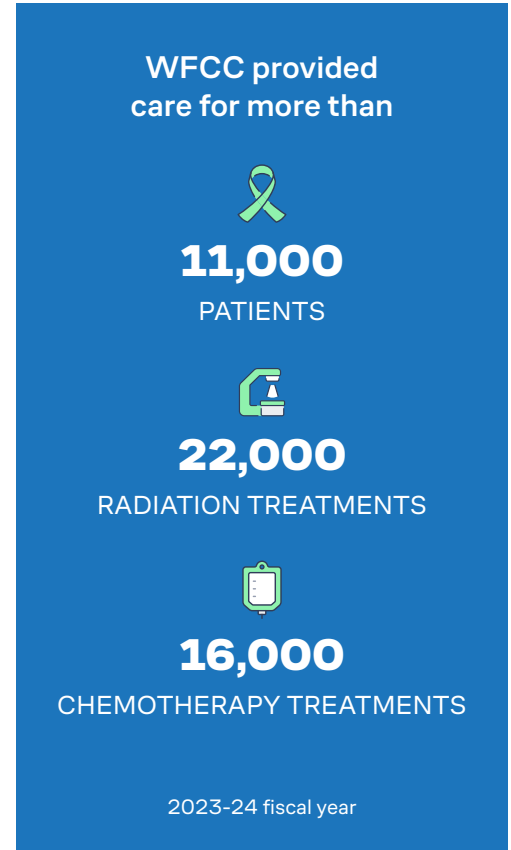
The WFCC radiation program is on a path of profound growth and innovation. The teams have worked to select a new linear accelerator and treatment planning software that will bring outstanding cancer care closer to home to Niagara residents.

Our program is supported by an exceptional team of medical physicists, physics associates, a medical physics systems administrator, a biomedical engineer, personal support workers (PSWs), clerical staff, radiation oncologists, radiation therapists, a clinical specialist radiation therapist, registered nurses (RNs), a clinical educator, students and volunteers.

This year represents the first time the WFCC collaborated with the Institute for Applied Health Sciences at McMaster to bring radiation therapy student learners on-site. We successfully placed two students who began in summer 2024 and

have welcomed three more this fall/winter. The person in our newly established clinical educator lead role has steered this initiative while simultaneously supporting the ongoing development of our multidisciplinary team.

Leadership expanded to include a new clinical supervisor position. This role was added to support patient flow, day-to-day operations and risk management. In partnership with the clinical manager, the clinical supervisor has worked to develop creative approaches to further develop our Disease Site Teams and improve staff engagement. This role has also allowed the radiation program to better align with our regional and provincial partners to improve access to care and reduce wait times for patients. As part of this effort, strides have been made in the standardization of wait time practices with the development of a robust wait time tracker.



Ludmilla Stasii was diagnosed with Stage II breast cancer in the spring of 2024. She finished her last chemotherapy treatment on September 24, 2024.

Supportive Care

Patients with a cancer diagnosis rely on multiple care providers during their treatment journey. This includes dietitians, spiritual care providers if requested, social workers, palliative physicians, nurse practitioners and RNs. The goals of the WFCC align with the Ontario Palliative Care Network (OPCN) and the identified key performance indicators set out to improve patient experience.

The supportive care team works to identify palliative care patients earlier, provide high quality care and improve serious illness conversations within the organization. Additional training toward palliative care with Indigenous patients continues with Lakehead University, the British Columbia Provincial Health Services Authority and the SAN'yas Indigenous Culture Safety course.

From left to right: Dr. Michael Moore, Dr. Derek Gillies and Dr. Baochang Liu.



Medical Physics

Radiation therapy uses high-energy particles or waves to kill or control the growth of cancer cells. Approximately 50 per cent of all patients with cancer receive this type of treatment, which would not be possible without our medical physicists.

Medical physicists at the WFCC apply their knowledge of physics to a variety of treatments, devices and technologies to provide the best care possible to patients. They are an integral part of the healthcare team for patients with cancer, and ensure that cancer treatment equipment operates safely and effectively. Medical physicists have specialized training in the medical applications of physics, which is the study of nature that focuses on the physical range of motion, force and energy.

Our team of medical physicists at the WFCC work extremely hard to help provide the most effective and comfortable cancer care to patients. Niagara Health has a team of five medical physicists (two of which are senior positions) and a director of physics, all of whom make a meaningful impact on patients' healthcare journeys.

Procurement for the first linear accelerator replacement has this team organized and excited to commission a Varian Edge unit. This state-of-the-art equipment is capable of delivering highly intricate, yet safe, radiation therapy close

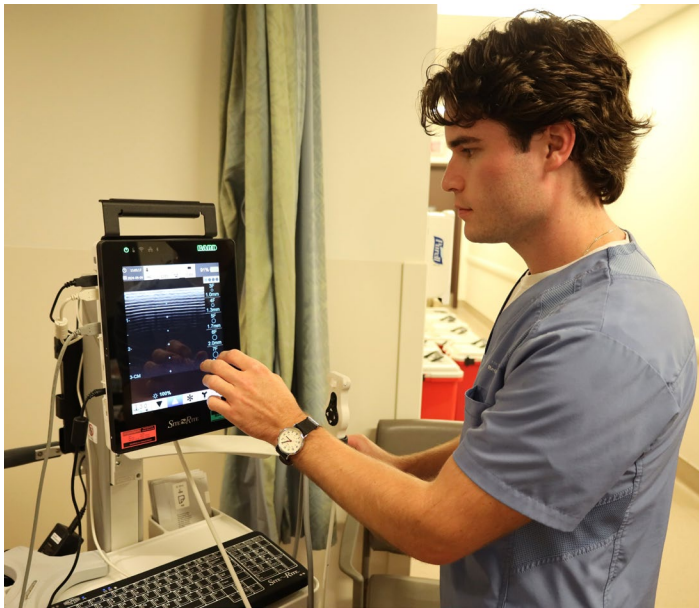
to home, reducing the need for patients to commute long distances to receive care. The Varian Edge will enable us to deliver better care and strengthen Niagara Health's patient-centered culture using more complex treatments tailored to the unique needs of the region. It will also keep up with advancements in the field as radiation treatment techniques continue to evolve. This unit is designed for treatments that are high dose per fraction. This means fewer trips to the WFCC for patients, making treatments more manageable and reducing the associated carbon footprint.



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Tracy Fazzari, Director, Oncology and Palliative Care, 3B Inpatient (interim) Niagara Health

3B Inpatient Unit



Niagara Health provides care to patients with malignant diseases. This is not limited to the outpatient setting within the WFCC. The 3B Inpatient ward at the Marotta Family Hospital in St. Catharines is a 44-bed unit staffed with specially trained nurses to look after oncology needs.

There is a commitment by the organization to provide exceptional care close to home which includes outpatient consultation and treatment as well as inpatient care for the sequela of the disease process. Opportunities for improvement in care management were identified by the oncology and medicine programs and a pilot project was initiated in March 2023.

This collaboration encouraged the cohorting of all medical oncology patients onto one unit with the goals to:

- Improve management of care with specialty training for nurses
- Reduce length of stay
- Reduce unnecessary emergency department admissions
- Create intentional and purposeful direct admission criteria

The oncology and medicine program collaboration is in line with Niagara Health's 2023-28 Strategic Plan:

- People first: Focusing on patient care being managed by the right providers in the right location and respecting care provider wellness.
- Safety and quality of care: Ensuring that all care providers managing oncology patients have the level of skill and development that will align with best practices and reduce risk.
- Transforming how we work: Cohort of oncology patients in one location to optimize care and efficiently utilize resources.

Medical Oncology

The WFCC boasts an established team that has been providing care to Niagara residents for more than 25 years. This group of medical oncologists and hematologists, nurse practitioners, RNs, PSWs, clerk receptionists, cancer care clerks, health record technicians, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, managed the care of more than 11,000 patients this past year.

Understanding and applying best practices for our patients is facilitated by our commitment to research. The primary areas of oncology research focus on the evaluation of novel cancer treatments in phase 3 trials, the role of circulating tumor DNA as a prognostic/predictive marker and improving patient outcomes and care delivery.

The WFCC is currently participating in **22 trials with nearly 150 participants**. We have **four academic trials** and **two industry-sponsored trials** that are open to recruitment. There are **13 academic** and **three industry-sponsored trials** currently active.

The oncology program received the following awards:

Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (CANO) 2023: Second place abstract poster winners: Enhancing the Patient's understanding of Their Oral Anti-Cancer Therapy: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Improving Oral Medication Counselling

Niagara Health Extraordinary Caring Award of Excellence 2024: Recipient Julie Klassen, RN

Niagara Health Nursing Excellence Award 2024: Recipient Teamwork and Collaboration - 3B Oncology nursing team

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