Infusion nurse Sarah Reed, BSN, RN
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Welcome

Friends and colleagues,

Welcome to the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) 2019–2020 Care in Action report.

Reflecting on the past two years, I am inspired by the myriad ways all of us at SCCA have come together to create a safe, respectful, caring experience for every patient who has come through our doors. SCCA’s collaborative spirit combines specialized expertise with compassion and always brings us back to what matters most — providing the best possible care for our patients.

Collaboration is at the heart of what makes SCCA remarkable. The exceptional care our teams provide is rooted in strong partnerships with our patients, their caregivers and each other.

Sometimes collaboration means sharing research that continues to push the boundaries of treatment options and clinical care. At other times, collaboration is a nurse taking extra time to listen to their patient’s concerns and perspectives and applying that knowledge to provide specialized care and inspire hope.

When the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly changed so much of our lives, this spirit of collaboration allowed us to rise above. SCCA employees from every part of the organization worked tirelessly to create innovative solutions and guide our patients through their care with patience, courage and compassion.

We have chosen to showcase two years of accomplishments in this annual report to highlight the growth, challenges and opportunities that 2019 and 2020 provided. As you read this report, it is my hope that you appreciate all the ways our SCCA team members collaborated with each other, our patients and the broader community to provide leadership and exceptional care during an unprecedented year of challenge and change.

We proved that, together, we can take on any challenge that comes our way.

With respect and gratitude,

Theresa McDonnell, DNP, ACNP-BC
Chief Nurse Executive / Senior Vice President of Operations / Chief of Staff
Our mission and values

Every SCCA employee makes unique contributions to our collective mission to lead the world in translating scientific discovery into the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and cure of cancer.

We are patient-centered

Everything we do must be linked to our ability to deliver better, safer outcomes for our patients. Nothing is more important, and any choice that could lead us astray from that focus is no choice at all. We approach everything we do with compassion, conviction and a constant striving because we know how profoundly important our work is to the lives of the patients we serve.

We are innovative

The existence of SCCA is the result of a truly innovative approach to fighting cancer. Each of us — regardless of the role we play — is here because we have the chance to push the boundaries of conventional wisdom in that fight. We will nurture an environment that fosters unconventional thinking, a passion for discovery and the open-mindedness to invite discovery from unexpected places.

We are respectful

Our diverse range of backgrounds, perspectives and experiences offers us the ability to meet the widely varied needs of the community of patients we serve. Each person and every job at SCCA plays a role in the safety and care of our patients. We are deeply respectful of our patients, their families and each of our colleagues who serve them in so many different and important ways.

We are collaborative

Our ability to be better together hinges on cultivating a culture of teamwork that is not only unusual, but unprecedented. Not just among the many different people of SCCA, but with our patients and caregivers as well. We understand that asking for and offering help in how to do better is not just a right, but among our most important responsibilities.

We are agile

We cannot just be comfortable with change; we must embrace it as proof that we are making progress. The speed of our progress is entirely linked to how well we integrate new insights into our research, our teaching and our clinical work. We will be known for our ability to adopt new approaches and practices, because our patients come to us for the most advanced care available.

We are responsible

Our work affects many dimensions of our patients’ lives. While our focus is on their health and safety, we are conscious of the impact cancer care can have on people’s emotional well-being, financial security and the environment we all share. Because our work is centered on people’s well-being, we approach it with the highest level of ethical, fiduciary and environmental responsibility.

Together, we exemplify our values at work and contribute to our shared goals of providing state-of-the-art patient and family centered care, supporting clinical research and education, and advancing the standard of oncology care.
Celebrate our achievements

SCCA’s care teams include leaders in oncology research and specialized practitioners in a variety of disciplines. Their knowledge and expertise help drive innovation and improve patient outcomes. The following highlights showcase the accomplishments of SCCA team members who have demonstrated their commitment to continuous learning and innovation in the field of oncology care.

Awards

The following awards honor SCCA’s commitment to supporting certification and continuing education as well as individual nurses’ commitment to excellence in oncology nursing and day-to-day patient care.

Puget Sound Oncology Nursing Society McCorkle Lectureship Award

Seth Eisenberg, RN, ASN, OCN, BMTCN, received the 2020 Ruth McCorkle Lectureship Award from the Puget Sound chapter of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS). Eisenberg, a professional practice coordinator in SCCA’s infusion department, was nominated for the award by his peers in recognition of his contributions to oncology nursing and his demonstration of the ONS core values of integrity, innovation, stewardship, advocacy, excellence and inclusiveness. Eisenberg will present the McCorkle Lecture, titled “Finding Your Passion: Gaining Inspiration and Inspiring Others,” at the ONS annual symposium in autumn 2021.

March of Dimes Washington State Nurse of the Year

Angie Rodriguez, MSN, RN, CNS-BC, AFN-BC, OCN, was named the 2019 Washington State Nurse of the Year in Ambulatory Care by the March of Dimes. Rodriguez, who was SCCA’s associate director of clinical operations for infusion and clinical trials at the time, helped implement a new infusion scheduling system that more effectively allocates space to streamline the patient infusion experience and reduce patient times. In addition to improving this process at SCCA, Rodriguez was a resource to other ambulatory centers nationwide that implemented similar efforts to optimize infusion schedules. Each year, the March of Dimes recognizes extraordinary nursing care in 15 categories. The Ambulatory Care award honors nurses who treat patients seeking care for acute and chronic illness.
Celebrating our achievements continued

Conferences

Conferences provide opportunities to share research, expand expertise and engage in continuing education. As leaders in the field of oncology care, SCCA care team members participated in the following conferences by presenting and learning from research aimed at improving the patient experience.

Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology (JADPRO) Live Conference

Gabrielle Zecha, PA-C, MHA, SCCA's director of advanced practice providers, was the conference chair for the 7th Annual JADPRO Live conference in 2019. More than 1,400 nurse practitioners, physician assistants and pharmacists, collectively referred to as advanced practitioners (APs), gathered at JADPRO Live to discuss the latest improvements in cancer care. JADPRO Live is the largest oncology conference for APs, inspired by the Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology (JADPRO), the first journal written by and for oncology and hematology advanced practitioners. The conference is held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Advanced Practitioner Society for Hematology and Oncology (APSHO), a society of more than 1,500 highly specialized clinicians who are on the front lines of patient care, managing treatment plans, educating patients and elevating the quality of care through interdisciplinary collaboration.

Seven APs from SCCA gave presentations or led workshops at JADPRO Live, and six more APs presented posters at the conference. Christine Yennaco, PA-C, MPH, MCHS, won the Outstanding Poster Award for her study titled “Compressed Workweeks: A Model for Improved Work-Life Balance and Retention of Oncology Advanced Practitioners.” The poster reviewed the results of implementing a comprehensive schedule modification for SCCA’s bone marrow transplant APs that maintained excellent patient care while improving work-life balance and retention of APs by transitioning to shorter workweeks.

American Society for Apheresis (ASFA) Annual Meeting

The American Society for Apheresis (ASFA) works to advance apheresis medicine for patients, donors and practitioners through education, evidence-based practice, research and advocacy. During its annual meeting, physicians, scientists and allied health professionals present abstracts on all aspects of apheresis medicine, including research, clinical, educational and administrative topics.

SCCA apheresis experts received the Best Abstract Award from ASFA for the following abstracts:

- 2019: Improved Collection Outcomes using Higher Heparin Concentration with the Spectra Optia CMNC Program
  Michelle Tumbaga-Flores, RN, BSN, HP (ASCP)CM

- 2020: Navigating an Apheresis Unit Through the New World of Immune Effector Cellular Collections
  Jody Chinn, BA
Oncology Nursing Society Congress

More than 40 SCCA nurses and supportive-care specialists joined colleagues from across the nation to present their research at the annual Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) Congress in April 2019. ONS is a professional association of more than 39,000 members committed to promoting excellence in oncology nursing.

At SCCA, nurses and supportive-care specialists are at the forefront of developing new models of care through evidence-based practice and patient-centered care. The following is a selection of SCCA presentations from ONS 2019 highlighting our nurses’ and supportive care specialists’ efforts to improve patient care.

- **Empowering the Next Generation of Nurses: In a Community Practice Setting**
  
  A podium presentation on a pilot project that created a senior nursing student clinical rotation at a community cancer center, building on the success of SCCA’s dedicated education unit (DEU) and nurse residency program.
  
  Rae Niculescu, MN, RN
  Shari Kidd, BSN, MBA-HM, RN

- **Oral Anti-Cancer Medication Program: A Nurse-Led Initiative**
  
  A poster presentation on creating standardized, collaborative processes with providers, pharmacists and clinical nurse coordinators (CNCs) for initiating and ongoing monitoring of care with oral anti-cancer medications.
  
  Catherine Munoz, BSN, RN, OCN
  Megan VanSanden, RN
  Ellen Alberts, MSN, ARNP-CNS, AGCNS-BC, AOCNS

- **Utilizing Design to Improve Patient Care**
  
  A poster presentation on the strategies used to engage oncology nursing staff and the multidisciplinary team in the complex process of designing a “care neighborhood” to provide integrated care and improve patient satisfaction.
  
  Sarah Kimbrough, MSN, RN, OCN
  Terri Cunningham, MSN, RN, AOCN
  Phuong Huynh, BSN, RN, OCN
  Laura Finical, BSN, RN
  Natasha Ng, MSN, RN, OCN
  Olivia Mullen, BSN, RN, OCN

SCCA nurses and supportive-care specialists at the ONS Congress in April 2019 in Anaheim, California.

SCCA nurses who gave ePoster Presentations at the 2019 ONS Congress.
Celebrating our achievements continued

Certifications

149 SCCA nurses have achieved a national board certification in their specialty, demonstrating their specialized knowledge and commitment to professional growth.

The total number of certified nurses at SCCA represents 51 percent of the SCCA nursing community. A higher certification rate has been associated with enhanced patient outcomes and improved quality indicators.

In 2019, apheresis nurses Cristina Gianan-Brown, BSN, RN, and Jackie Mina-de la Cruz, BSN, RN, completed the Qualification in Apheresis (QIA) certification from the American Society for Apheresis. Achieving this certification requires specialized experience, training and skills in apheresis and passing a timed exam demonstrating clinical knowledge.

ONCC Large Employer of the Year Award

In 2020, SCCA received the Large Employer of the Year award from the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC). The award recognized SCCA’s strong support of oncology nursing certification and continuing education. ONCC is the premier provider of nationally accredited certification for nurses in oncology and related specialties; its mission is to promote health and safety by validating competence and ensuring lifelong learning.

Cristina Gianan-Brown, BSN, RN, QIA (ASCP)

Terry McDonnell, DNP, ACNP-BC, Chief Nurse Executive, Senior Vice President of Operations and Chief of Staff, with the ONCC’s Large Employer of the Year award.
New DAISY Award wall unveiled

Twenty years after SCCA nurses inspired the creation of the DAISY Award, a three-dimensional art display was installed at SCCA’s South Lake Union clinic to honor recipients of the award. The DAISY Award and the new art installation celebrate the care, compassion and dedication our nurses show their patients each and every day.

The story of the DAISY Award begins at SCCA. In 1999, J. Patrick Barnes, a two-time survivor of Hodgkin lymphoma, spent eight weeks with Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center/University of Washington Medical Center/SCCA receiving treatment for idiopathic thrombocytopenia purpura, an autoimmune disorder. His nurses’ humility, kindness and compassion impressed Barnes’ family. After he died, they created the DAISY Award (Diseases Attacking the Immune SYstem) to honor nurses.

The DAISY Award has now spread from SCCA to more than 3,000 health care facilities and nursing schools in every U.S. state and 23 countries.

The art installation, located on the second floor at the SLU clinic, was officially unveiled on July 30, 2019, and serves as an invitation for patients and staff to learn more about the SCCA nurses who go above and beyond. Nathaniel, a Gig Harbor, Washington, artist, stained and painted wooden daisies and panels with vibrant hues and patterns, offsetting wooden daisy frames that house photos of SCCA’s DAISY Award recipients. He intentionally included bold, bright colors in the display.

Nathaniel explained, “I want people to do more than just look at it. I want them to travel through this artwork through color, through pictures, though texture and through dimension.” His work was made more meaningful knowing that his mother, a nurse in Gig Harbor, is a DAISY Award recipient. “I have a strong connection to nurses and all that they do for their patients,” he said.

Melissa Barnes, Patrick Barnes’ sister-in-law and vice president of operations and international program director for the DAISY Foundation, says it never ceases to amaze her how nurses around the world share a common goal of dedicating their lives to caring for patients. Barnes, who traveled to SCCA to attend the DAISY wall celebration, considers the artwork a tribute to nurses everywhere, whose focus is on “providing the very best care possible to patients around the world, to complete strangers.”

“You feel the wall’s warmth and sheer beauty,” Barnes said. “It’s almost like the spirit of nursing is coming through that wall.”
DAISY Award recipient Gloria Daniels, BSN, RN, with Suni Elgar, MPH, BSN, RN.

For Gloria Daniels, BSN, RN, the 12 years she has worked at SCCA have encompassed the full circle of patient care. Daniels started her SCCA career as an LPN in the Alliance Lab in 2009. After completing her associate’s degree in nursing (ADN) program, she worked in the Imaging Department for five years, eventually becoming a charge nurse while finishing her bachelor’s degree in nursing at the University of Washington. In 2018, Daniels took on a new role as an apheresis nurse.

While she did not originally plan to work in oncology, Daniels said that once she started working at SCCA, she felt that she had found her calling. SCCA’s collaborative approach to care and emphasis on creating a respectful, patient-centered experience appealed most to Daniels and contribute to an environment in which she feels that she can provide the best possible care to patients.

“I stayed with SCCA because I love what I do here and I love our patients,” Daniels said. “I’ve seen different aspects of care, and it’s always been positive. Hearing patients’ stories and collaborating with the rest of the care team makes me feel fortunate to be here.”

Apheresis is a procedure that separates blood into its components; it may be part of treatment for blood cancers and blood disorders or used to gather stem cells for transplant. Apheresis procedures can take up to six hours, depending on the procedure and difficulty of the process. Patients may come in as often as twice a week for treatments that last two to three hours. As an apheresis nurse, Daniels works one-on-one with patients, which allows her to get to know each patient and advocate for them when needed.

“I learn from the patient as much as they learn from me,” Daniels said. “I can spend time with my patients, get to know them and get to understand what they’re going through so I can be there for them.”

Less than a year after joining the apheresis team, Daniels received the DAISY Award after being nominated by a grateful patient. She said she was surprised to receive the award, but also honored, especially considering the history of the award at SCCA.

“It caught me completely off guard,” Daniels said. “But I was also happy that I was able to make such a difference in somebody else’s care.”

### 2019–2020 DAISY Award Recipients

**May 2019**
- Marni Walker, BSN, RN
- Jennifer Lynch, BSN, RN, BMTCN
- Devyn Huylar, BSN, RN, BMTCN

**July 2019**
- Gloria Daniels, BSN, RN
- Molly Winklepleck, BSN, RN, BMTCN
- Margaret O’Malley, BSN, RN, OCN

**December 2019**
- Soyoung Park, RN
- Jeannie Warner, BSN, RN, OCN
- Sarah Rebaldo, BSN, RN

**February 2020**
- Cindy Klein, BSN, RN
- Natasha Ng, MSN, RN, OCN

**May 2020**
- Jackie Saxon, BSN, RN, BMTCN
- Annie Alidina, ARNP

**September 2020**
- Hannah Huebner, BSN, RN, OCN
- Diane Heye, BSN, RN, OCN
- Katie Swartz, BSN, RN

Gloria Daniels with her Apheresis colleague Michelle Flores, BSN, RN, HP(ASCP).
During his first two years of college, Justin Yang, BSN, RN, was both a biology major and a patient undergoing treatment for Hodgkin lymphoma. After completing treatment, Yang changed his major to nursing, a decision that was inspired by the nurses who cared for him and a desire to learn more about oncology care.

“It made me rethink what I wanted to do with my life,” Yang said. “If I didn’t have cancer, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

Yang enrolled in the nursing program at Seattle University and was assigned to SCCA for his clinical rotation. His experience as a resident nurse gave him exposure to departments throughout SCCA, including immunotherapy, pharmacy and infusion. He said that he “fell in love” with the supportive, positive environment at SCCA and chose to complete his senior practicum here.

For Yang, the most difficult aspect of his nursing residency was that, at times, caring for patients and caregivers brought back emotions from his own experience with cancer. He said that discussing this with his colleagues and the manager of the nursing residency program provided valuable support, and he felt that he had the resources to deal with any challenges that arose throughout his residency.

“I think it was nice to be able to relate to the patient story, but I learned as a nurse that everyone’s cancer journey is different, so it’s really important to have individualized care for each patient,” Yang said.

After graduation, Yang was hired as an infusion nurse at SCCA. He is one of four nurses from his 2018 cohort of nurse residents who now works in infusion. The transition from student to nurse was smooth for Yang, which he attributed to the insight that he gained during his time as a resident.

“Residency really prepared me,” Yang said. “I already understood how the organization works and how different departments communicate with each other.”

Although he is interested in potentially pursuing advanced education and learning more about the field of oncology-research nursing, for now Yang is happy in his current role as an infusion nurse. He described his team as “a big family,” and said that on his days off he misses going to work.
Investing in the future of oncology nursing

SCCA’s care teams are its greatest resources. Investing in the personal and professional growth of staff members is an investment in SCCA’s future ability to provide specialized, patient-centered care. The following scholarship recipients from 2019 and 2020 have demonstrated their commitment to continuous learning and dedicated clinical excellence in cancer care.

Rosemary Ford Future of Oncology Nursing Scholarship

The Rosemary Ford Future of Oncology Nursing Scholarship supports oncology nursing students at local colleges and universities, as well as SCCA nurses enrolled in advanced nursing programs. The scholarship honors Rosemary Ford’s 40-year legacy of nurturing the continuum of education in the nursing profession throughout SCCA.

2019 Scholarship Recipients

- Melissa Schultz, Seattle Pacific University
- Margaret Susan McKay, Seattle University
- Aubrey Hughes, University of Washington
- Amylia Castillo, BSN, RN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Erin Croft, LPN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Mitch Mitchell, BSN, RN, OCN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Sara Rose Rivett, BS, RN, BMTCN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance

2020 Scholarship Recipients

- Marlia Grace Sutherland, Seattle Pacific University
- Amaia Laskin, Seattle University
- Minju Hong, University of Washington
- Colleen Detweiler, BSN, RN, OCN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Costa Herbert, BSN, RN, BMTCN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Margaret O’Malley, RN, SCRN, OCN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Sydne Mead Smith, BSN, RN, OCN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
**Investing in the future of oncology nursing continued**

**Professional Development Council Scholarship**
Each year, SCCA awards five scholarships valued at $2,000 each for non-presenting nurses to attend a national conference. The scholarships provide an opportunity to learn about oncology-nursing research and how it can support innovations in patient care.

**2019 Scholarship Recipients**
- Jodie Errington, BSN, RN
- Beatrice Franco, BSN, RN, OCN
- Jaclyn Gines, BSN, RN
- Megan Miller, BSN, RN, OCN
- Mariah Oakes, RN

**Harold and John Steinberg Scholarship**
The Harold and John Steinberg Memorial Nursing Scholarship Fund provides support for continuing nursing education, including conferences, workshops and tuition, for nurses at Seattle Children’s, the University of Washington and SCCA. The scholarship supports the crucial role nurses play in research and patient care.

**2019 Scholarship Recipients**
- Brianna Grozak, MSN, RN, Seattle Children’s
- Kirsten Cifelli, BSN, RN, Seattle Children’s
- Jaclyn Ingham, BSN, RN, University of Washington
- Brenda Duong, DNP, FNP, University of Washington
- Jodie David, RN, OCN, CHPN, NC-BC, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Julia Majovski, DNP, ARNP, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance

**2020 Scholarship Recipients**
- Kelsey Balmelli, BSN, RN, Seattle Children's
- Liza Murren, RN, Seattle Children's
- Kaitlyn Drew, MN, RN, OCN, University of Washington
- Karen Survis, BSN, RN, University of Washington
- Brittni Clay, BSN, RN, OCN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Karen Kuster, BSN, RN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
- Alexa Ostrander, BSN, RN, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
Pharmacokinetics Laboratory supports care at SCCA and beyond

The Pharmacokinetics Laboratory (PK Lab) at SCCA, often referred to as the Busulfan Lab, specializes in therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM) for patients diagnosed with various blood disorders. TDM measures drug concentrations for medications with a narrow therapeutic window to assess and adjust medication dosage, optimize therapeutic effectiveness and minimize adverse effects.

In addition to providing individualized drug-exposure targeting for patients from the SCCA Clinic, the PK Lab provides clinical services for patients from more than 95 medical institutions, including the University of Washington Medical Center, Seattle Children’s and the Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center in Seattle, and many others throughout the United States and Canada. The SCCA lab has become one of the most highly regarded laboratories in the medical community, supporting clinical treatment not only at SCCA and its partner organizations but also at local, regional, national and international health care facilities.

As the gold standard for busulfan TDM testing, the PK Lab expands its outreach and collaboration through its Laboratory Accuracy Verification Program for Busulfan to examine the proficiency of and provide guidance to 20 clinical labs throughout North America that perform busulfan testing.

In 2020, the PK Lab introduced two new technologies that improved processes and efficiency. The first change was upgrading the patient status tracking system to a new technology called OutSystems. The updated dashboard pulls patient data directly from the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) and allows team members to track where each patient is in the workflow process in real time. The new system saves the team time by reducing duplicate steps of hand-entered data, creates an easily accessed historical record and allows team members to efficiently manage tasks remotely.

“The COVID-19 pandemic certainly changed the way we’ve done our work,” said Pharmacokinetics Manager Hung Nguyen, MBA, MLS (ASCP)CM. “We’re a lab, so it’s required that most of our team be on-site, but we’ve found solutions to limit our staff here to make sure everyone is safe. We do have administrative and computer-based tasks that are critical to the care of our patients, and we’ve been able to migrate these tasks to remote work. At the height of the pandemic, we were able to shift to have one or two people at a time work from home.”

In addition to the OutSystems dashboard, the PK Lab also implemented liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS) technology, which significantly increased the lab’s efficiency. The LC-MS system provides the lab with the ability to process more patient samples and cuts down the time to process each sample by approximately 2,000 percent. With this new technology, it takes
only 31 seconds for the instrument to process each sample, allowing the lab to serve more patients.

The PK Lab’s specialized team also collaborates with providers and researchers on clinical research protocols of various oncology-related agents. During the past year, the team has been actively involved in developing two new assays, which are investigative procedures to determine the presence, amount or functional activity of chemotherapeutic agents. The lab is developing the assays in partnership with Lauri Burroughs, MD, director of SCCA’s Non-Malignant Transplant Program.

PK Lab Director Rosa Yeh, PharmD, said the team is developing assays for internal clinical-research protocols. In addition, SCCA’s lab was selected as the reference lab for a multi-institution study for the Blood and Marrow Transplant Clinical Trials Network (BMT CTN), a national organization that conducts large multi-institutional clinical trials that address important issues in hematopoietic stem cell transplantation.

“We started as a research lab, and while we are a clinical lab, we have seen the need and the importance of going back to our roots in terms of being involved in research,” Yeh said.

Looking ahead, another area of focus for the PK Lab will be precision medicine, starting with incorporating pharmacogenomics into a new assay and testing, which is expected to go live in June 2021. Pharmacogenomics studies how genes affect a person’s response to drugs and aims to develop safe, effective medications and doses that are tailored to an individual’s genetic makeup. Yeh hopes the PK Lab can be a leader in the field of precision medicine.

Across all aspects of its work — developing groundbreaking technologies and setting the standard for labs across the country — SCCA’s PK Lab maintains its focus on the ongoing professional and personal development of its employees. Each of the lab’s technologists is required to be certified by the American Society of Clinical Pathologists, and one part of the lab’s professional training program is a monthly journal club that enables technologists to earn continuing-education credits to maintain their credentials. The team also participates in a resiliency program based on the University of Pennsylvania’s Master Resilience Training program.

“Our staff is our biggest asset, and they’re certainly critical to our success,” Nguyen said. “Developing them, both technically for the lab as well as personally, is extremely important to us.”
Pharmacy redesign: Collaboration and innovation at work

SCCA’s new state-of-the-art pharmacy first came to life as a full-scale, three-dimensional model built entirely out of cardboard. The cardboard model, constructed as part of the project’s 2019 integrated facility design process, allowed pharmacy team members to run full-scale simulations to test workflow processes and equipment placement.

“It was made clear to pharmacy staff that this was their pharmacy, they would work in it, and it should function as they wanted it to,” said Director of Pharmacy Rick LaFrance, PharmD.

At SCCA, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, pharmacy assistants and pharmacy student interns are integral to providing patients with comprehensive, coordinated care. Pharmacy team members plan treatment with providers and clinical pharmacists, triage nurse calls, compound medications, prepare IV medications for patient rooms, and verify orders to ensure they meet safety and quality standards. The pharmacy’s advanced systems ensure medication pickup and delivery occur on a 10-minute cycle, guaranteeing medications get to patients quickly.

The new pharmacy space, which opened in 2019, was designed by the pharmacy team with patient-centered care at the forefront of their design decisions. The updated pharmacy meets high quality standards for injectable drugs, reduces waste by extending the shelf life of drugs from 12 to 24 hours, and improves the safety and quality of medications. The larger space also increases the pharmacy’s capacity to meet the demand for clinical trials.

In addition to these improvements, new technology will soon be implemented in the space. Two KIRO Oncology compounding robots will compound hazardous medications in a safe, efficient way that meets sterility standards. SCCA will be the only pharmacy on the West Coast with this technology.

The pharmacy team’s thoughtful approach to the design of its new space, collaborative processes and innovative equipment exemplify SCCA’s commitment to keeping patients and caregivers at the center of its work.
CORS model expands access to clinical trials

After careful planning, the Clinical Operations – Research Services (CORS) team officially launched a new model of research support in September 2020. CORS builds a unified, expert system of research support at SCCA and contributes to the goals of reducing study start-up duration, improving protocol compliance and increasing operational efficiency.

“The process of planning for and implementing the disease-program-based CORS model involved coordination with every clinical service area that supports research activities within SCCA as well as our partners at Fred Hutch and UW Medicine,” said CORS Associate Director Sarah Wallace, MS.

The rollout of the CORS Clinical Readiness model started with a proof-of-concept pilot in fiscal year 2019 that included 17 pilot studies from a variety of programs. As a centralized resource, the CORS team can quickly provide study staff with answers and solutions when issues arise. CORS team members also work on behalf of clinical departments to answer study feasibility questions and address operational challenges once studies are active, allowing clinic partners to focus on patient care.

During the September 2020 launch, research teams began transitioning to the Clinical Readiness model using a phased approach, with the goal of completing the rollout to the general oncology and hematology programs by summer of 2021. A research coordinator and research nurse from the CORS team support each program and serve as the dedicated contacts for the study team.

While creating new processes and communication norms for each team has been complex at times, Wallace said she has received positive feedback from the teams that have already converted to the Clinical Readiness model. Study teams have said they appreciate feeling like they have a dedicated partner to go to for questions. For CORS team members, the ability to focus on supporting a single disease program has also allowed them to specialize in a specific area and develop relationships with the program's study team.

Wallace said that, overall, the adoption of the CORS model is a shift toward SCCA taking ownership for developing implementation plans and creating research orders to best support the needs of its patients. The CORS model aims to provide more people with access to promising new treatments through clinical studies.

“Our goal is to improve the study start-up process, allowing studies to open more quickly,” Wallace said. “This means we're able to offer trial participation as an option to more patients.”

About the CORS team

CORS partners with SCCA research teams to support faster study start-up and improved research care delivery by:

- Ensuring clinic readiness for new research studies into the clinic and inpatient oncology environments
- Reducing start-up effort required by research teams
- Updating education materials and orders in response to protocol amendments
- Serving as primary point of contact for clinic operations questions
- Participating in the development of investigator-initiated trial protocols to ensure they are consistent with clinic operations and policies
Dietitians and nurses collaborate to improve patient care

At times, the use of a feeding tube is a necessary component of oncology care, helping to keep patients on treatment and preventing complications. To ensure SCCA patients receive timely nutrition support, the medical nutrition therapy and nursing teams partnered to develop and implement an institutional practice that allows registered dietitians (RDs) to place nasoenteric feeding tubes.

The process to develop this new practice began six years ago, when Laura Buono, RD, CSO, CD, CNSC, joined SCCA’s medical nutrition therapy team. At a previous job as an RD in an ICU, Buono helped develop a protocol that allowed RDs to place nasoenteric feeding tubes, which are placed through the nose into the stomach or small intestine. Buono’s manager, Kerry McMillen, MS, RD, CSO, CD, FAND, supported the idea of implementing a similar practice in SCCA’s outpatient clinic.

“Kerry was 100 percent on board since the day she hired me,” Buono said. “Having Kerry and SCCA be so supportive of this innovation says a lot about the organization. We’re cutting-edge, and we’re doing this when many other places are not yet.”

Buono has traveled throughout the United States to give presentations and trainings and said that, while the practice of RDs placing feeding tubes is growing nationally, it is still uncommon and is currently happening most often in an inpatient setting. To implement this new practice at SCCA, the medical nutrition therapy and nursing teams formed a workgroup that created institutional policies, scope-of-service guidelines and competency-and-training requirements based on national recommendations. The workgroup’s goal was to create a comprehensive process to identify malnutrition or the risk of malnutrition, then come up with a protocol for RDs to place feeding tubes to avoid delays in starting nutrition care.

After years of work, two of SCCA’s RDs completed training and began placing feeding tubes for patients in 2020. McMillen said the new practice contributes to a patient-centered experience and supports proactive nutrition care. Prior to this change, a nurse who might not have been previously involved in the patient’s care would place the feeding tube. The updated process ensures that care teams can quickly place feeding tubes and start nutrition support when the risk of malnutrition is identified without scheduling a separate nurse consult.

This project represents innovation in clinical interprofessional practice in oncology care, and Buono presented it at the American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN) 45th Annual Conference, a virtual conference that took place in April 2020. SCCA continues to collect data by tracking patients’ outcomes with the goal of sharing these findings in the future.

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SCCA’s geographic growth: Bringing care closer to home

Putting patients first has always been SCCA’s guiding principle. With this commitment in mind, SCCA has continued to expand its footprint by adding clinical sites that bring its world-class care to more people throughout the region. In 2019 and 2020, SCCA opened patient-care centers in Issaquah and Poulsbo, as well as a joint cancer program with Overlake Medical Center & Clinics in Bellevue.

SCCA’s community sites are strategically located across the Puget Sound region to provide patients with quality care and the most advanced treatments closer to home. These clinics reflect SCCA’s commitment to expanding access to cancer-treatment services in locations that are familiar, comforting and accessible for patients.

“There is no question that offering cancer treatment in a local setting — where patients can be closer to home and the people and things they love — can contribute to their healing. We are proud to offer the communities of Issaquah, Poulsbo and Bellevue the superior outcomes and patient experience that define SCCA care,” said Jennie R. Crews, MD, MMM, FACP, vice president and medical director of the SCCA Community Oncology and Network Affiliate Program.

The SCCA Issaquah clinic opened in April 2019, and provides comprehensive cancer care, including medical oncology, infusion therapy, hematology, phlebotomy, nutrition and social work. The clinic was designed with a universal-room concept, in which the care team brings all services to the patient in one location. This care model supports healing with a comfortable and private space, and Issaquah’s committed care team provides personalized, streamlined, high-quality care.

The SCCA Peninsula clinic in Poulsbo, which opened in January 2019, expanded its existing on-site radiation oncology program in January 2020, adding hematology and oncology consultation and management, infusion therapy with an on-site pharmacy, and supportive-care services. The clinic’s team-based approach allows for seamless integration between radiation oncology and medical oncology treatments, and the clinic’s flex rooms, infusion bays and family-friendly environment add to its comfort and convenience.

Kara Smith, BSN, RN, Kristin Wersom, BSN, RN, Jason Lukas, MD, PhD, and Alyssa Chen, MSN, ARNP, FNP-C, at SCCA Issaquah.
In July 2020, SCCA and Bellevue’s Overlake Medical Center & Clinics launched a joint cancer-treatment program to bring nationally renowned cancer care to the heart of Puget Sound’s Eastside. At the state-of-the-art Overlake Cancer Center, SCCA provides hematology, medical oncology and infusion services, and Overlake provides radiation oncology, surgical oncology, inpatient oncology and ancillary services. This unique team approach gives patients access to a broad array of services, including experienced providers, innovative treatments and one-of-a-kind clinical trials.

“A central part of our mission is to ensure people have access to the best cancer treatments as close to their community and loved ones as possible,” said Nancy Davidson, executive director and president of SCCA. “These clinics will provide patients across our region with the highest level of care and the most advanced treatments available.”

SCCA team members and community leaders at the grand opening of the SCCA Issaquah clinic on June 26, 2019.
Better together: SCCA’s response to COVID-19

In March 2020, the world changed with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. The earliest confirmed case of COVID-19 in the United States was reported in Washington state, thrusting SCCA to the forefront of this public-health crisis. SCCA staff stepped up to support patients and families by quickly developing brand-new procedures and protocols, and SCCA’s care teams continued to provide exceptional cancer treatment in the face of uncertainty and rapid change. Below is an overview of some of the actions that have helped keep SCCA patients, staff and community members safe during COVID-19.

Patients and caregivers at the center of SCCA’s COVID-19 response

SCCA implemented robust infection-prevention protocols to safeguard the health and well-being of its community while ensuring patients continued to receive excellent cancer care. Clinical teams swiftly adapted to new guidelines for personal protective equipment (PPE), deployed new screening processes and increased the frequency of cleaning high-touch surfaces.

To minimize exposure in its clinical areas, SCCA employees from across the organization volunteered to help screen patients, visitors and staff coming to SCCA’s outpatient clinics or hospital. Patients experiencing mild symptoms prior to their appointments could also call a dedicated COVID-19 triage line. Nurses answering the triage line conducted a brief survey to screen patients for respiratory symptoms, travel and other possible exposures to COVID-19 before their appointments.

In addition to screening, SCCA rapidly scaled up COVID-19 testing for patients or staff members with symptoms. In 2020, SCCA conducted 14,531 COVID-19 tests for SCCA patients and staff.

To help keep patients away from urgent care or emergency rooms during COVID-19, SCCA expedited the planned opening of an Acute Clinical Evaluation (ACE) clinic for patients experiencing cancer- and treatment-related pain and symptoms that cannot be managed at home. The three-bed ACE clinic, planned for summer 2020, opened ahead of schedule in May 2020 to serve SCCA patients at the South Lake Union clinic, helping them avoid emergency rooms during a time when COVID-19 rates were spiking.

SCCA continued to care for patients on clinical trials so that research to improve the lives of people with cancer could move forward. During the initial COVID-19 surge, SCCA limited access to some Phase 1 and Phase 3 clinical trials, but Phase 2 clinical trials continued for patients who, with their care team, determined that clinical trial participation was important for their well-being. As the surge receded, clinical trials slowly began ramping up again, with a focus on balancing staff and patient safety.
SCCA teams respond to uncertainty with innovation and agility

When faced with the uncertain and rapidly shifting nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, SCCA staff demonstrated their capacity for creating innovative solutions. These efforts included expanding the telemedicine program and shifting as many employees as possible to remote work.

SCCA rapidly scaled up its telemedicine program by prioritizing physician credentialing and training. In 2019, SCCA conducted a total of 30 telehealth visits. In 2020, due to COVID-19, SCCA conducted nearly 25,000 telehealth visits. Check-ups and other non-urgent patient visits, supportive care services and even some multidisciplinary clinics, in which patients see multiple providers during one visit, transitioned to virtual care.

In addition to moving some patient appointments to virtual care, SCCA quickly shifted as many employees as possible to remote work. Since March 2020, approximately 40 percent of SCCA employees have been able to work remotely, both full-time and part-time, significantly reducing the number of employees on campus.

As vaccines were approved in late 2020, SCCA worked to vaccinate staff, patients, caregivers and the community as they became eligible based on the state’s phased approach. SCCA partnered with Fred Hutch to create a joint vaccine program in South Lake Union that administered nearly 80,000 vaccinations, and also worked with community-site partners to provide vaccines to eligible individuals at clinics throughout the region.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented both unique challenges and learning opportunities. The future trajectory of this pandemic is still uncertain, and SCCA continues to prepare for its widespread, long-term impact by adjusting policies and procedures to prioritize patients’ health and safety. SCCA’s overarching goal remains the same: to provide high-quality, compassionate, safe care for patients with cancer.

Publications

More than 25 publications highlighted SCCA’s organizational response to the pandemic, covering topics including managing outpatients and inpatients, revamping treatment approaches, patient and staff safety, and ethical considerations. The below list includes some of these publications.

**Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network**
Managing Cancer Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Agility and Collaboration Toward a Common Goal
Safety at the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic: How to Keep Our Oncology Patients and Healthcare Workers Safe

**Journal of Clinical Pathways**
NCCN Publishes Guidance for Cancer Centers During COVID-19 Pandemic

**Journal of Oncology Practice**
Considerations for Managing Patients with Hematologic Malignancy During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Seattle Strategy

**The Oncology Nursing Society Podcast**
Episode 97: COVID-19 Cancer Care Lessons from Seattle and New York

**Association of Community Cancer Centers**
Drive-Thru COVID-19 Screening

**Journal of Clinical Pathways**
Cancer Care in the Time of COVID-19

**Clinical Advances in Hematology & Oncology**
Providing Oncology Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic