



Florida Privileged With Top-Notch Cancer Centers

by Lois Thomson

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South Florida can be thankful that it has such tremendous resources when it comes to cancer care. Two institutions in particular – the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute and Boca Raton Community Hospital – are located on the Tampa campus of the University of South Florida and in Boca Raton, respectively.

Boca Raton Community Hospital has a Center for Breast Care that has developed a unique approach to screening, diagnosing and treating breast cancer. Kathy Schilling, M.D., is a radiologist and medical director of Breast Imaging and Intervention, and has been with the Center since it opened in 1990. "There's been tremendous growth over the years," she said. "It has grown from a handful (of patients) to 45,000 cases a year." The growth is attributed in part to the special care patients receive.

"Breast cancer is a very complex disease," Schilling continued, "and it involves the expertise of many different medical specialists. It includes not only radiology, but also surgery, pathology, plastic surgery—we take care of the whole patient."

The Center does this with a "team approach," that is, by having a group of professionals from all relevant areas review the cases and devise a customized plan of action for each one. "I think it's very comforting (for patients)," Schilling commented, "because they're getting the expertise of everyone—it's not just the opinion of one person. (The professionals) oversee what each is telling the others about the patient, so it's a system of checks and balances."

One particular area in which the Center for Breast Care has forged a path is in performing biopsies. "All suspicious abnormalities are biopsied with needles," Schilling explained; and it is these revolutionary biopsies that have brought women in from far outside the regular service area. Schilling, who is one of the most experienced physicians in the nation performing biopsies using these techniques and who trains her counterparts around the world, said patients come from out of state and as far away as the islands.

Similar to Boca Raton's team approach is Moffitt Cancer Center's idea of clinical programs, which is an interdisciplinary team approach to the evaluation and treatment of patients with cancer. In Moffitt's case, the services have been organized into 14 interdisciplinary clinical programs, each focusing on a specific area of cancer such as breast or lung cancer, or on a type of therapy such as gastrointestinal malignancies. The team for each program consists of medical and radiation oncologists, surgeons, nurses, administrative managers, and other appropriate support personnel. The objectives are to provide interdisciplinary evaluation of cancer patients, develop and conduct clinical research trials, and provide educational programs and training.

Moffitt, which opened in 1986, was funded by the State Legislature through proceeds from Florida's cigarette tax. The Center has one priority—to fight cancer through patient care, education and research, and its overall vision is "to be the leader in scientific discovery and translation into compassionate care, cures, and prevention of cancer for our community and the world."

Since it opened, the Moffitt Cancer Center has expanded to include the Moffitt Research Center, which houses cancer prevention and research space, and an auditorium and library; and the four-story Vincent A. Stabile Research Building, which doubles the size of the research capabilities, and includes such facilities as a digital imaging center, an infusion center, and a conference center.

Because of the strides it has made since its inception, the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute in 2001 received designation as the only National Cancer Institute Comprehensive Cancer Center in Florida, and one of just 39 in the United States. Such an honor is awarded to centers that have demonstrated a successful track record in cancer research, innovative treatment and compassionate care.

One woman who is grateful for the work of these institutions is Christine Najac, founder of Really Good Cookies. One way Najac has shown her appreciation is by designing "Pink Ribbon Cookies," and donating 20 percent of the proceeds of the sale of these particular cookies to the Moffitt and Boca Raton cancer centers. "My Mom is a breast cancer survivor and it's my way of giving back and showing gratitude," Najac said by way of explanation. "I chose Moffitt because you can have your donation ear-marked for breast cancer research, and I chose Boca Raton because it's my neighborhood hospital." Najac opened Really Good Cookies in October 2003, and began making Pink Ribbon Cookies this past October. "This is my little part in the big picture," she said. "I wanted to do more than just write a check."

For more information, visit www.brch.com , www.moffitt.usf.edu , or www.pinkribboncookies.com