Lank Center’s cancer research efforts aided by visiting committee member

Both as a patient and a member of the visiting committee for Dana-Farber’s Lank Center for Genitourinary Oncology, Gerhard “Gerry” Andlinger has seen up close the center's progress in prostate cancer research and treatment. Now, through an extraordinary gesture of support, this survivor of the disease is taking steps to ensure these efforts continue.

Extending a decade of giving back to the Institute that treated him and his late wife, Arntraud, Andlinger has pledged $5 million to the Lank Center to fund studies in genomics, imaging, and translational science. A portion of the gift will be used to improve the quality of life for patients during their treatment through Dana-Farber’s Pain and Palliative Care Program. In addition, this gift will establish a strategic initiative fund under the direction of Institute President Edward J. Benz Jr., M.D., to strengthen core facilities and bolster trans-discipline collaborations.

“I am pleased and proud to continue helping Dana-Farber in its efforts to eliminate all forms of cancer,” says Andlinger. “I hope this latest gift has a major impact in the field of genitourinary oncology.”

Explains Philip Kantoff, M.D., director of the Lank Center and Andlinger’s physician, “These initiatives will get us much closer to solving the three critical clinical problems in prostate cancer: deciding who needs to be treated, reducing the morbidity or side effects of treatment, and improving the treatment for men with advanced disease.”

“In addition, the gift will help improve patient care and enhance linkages with the other Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center institutions through the President’s Fund.”

This is the third major gift made by Lank Center visiting committee member Andlinger, page 3

Blossom Marshall and Amy Porter-Tacoronte are ‘YMCA Black Achievers’

“It can get very busy here, so we might be interrupted,” Blossom Marshall warns a visitor to her office in the Abraham D. Gosman Adult Care Clinic. “I hope you can find the time to have a look around. It can be overwhelming, but it’s important to see the big picture.”

As if to prove her point, the phone rings almost as soon as she finishes speaking. It is a doctor at Brigham and Women’s Hospital wishing to schedule a patient appointment at Dana-Farber. Marshall’s job as a clinic facilitator keeps her in almost constant motion – fielding phone calls, meeting with patients, and scheduling appointments. But it is the courtesy and confidence with which she performs her duties that earned her a YMCA Black Achiever award this year, an honor she shares with Amy Porter-Tacoronte, program administrator for the Lowe Center for Thoracic Oncology.

The Black Achievers program recognizes African-Americans for their professionalism and hard work in community service. Run as a national partnership between the YMCA and Black Achievers’ sponsoring employers, the program will recognize about 80 men and women at Boston-area companies this year.

Blossom Marshall and Amy Porter-Tacoronte will be among the local honorees at the YMCA Black Achievers recognition dinner, to be held Jan. 25 at the Boston Marriott Copley Place.

Dana-Farber works to reduce adult patient waiting times

Mention the phrase “10 to 2” at Dana-Farber, and just about everyone working in the clinical service knows what you mean. It’s the longstanding problem, more noticeable in recent years, of too many patients booked for visits in the late mornings and early afternoons.

The clustering of appointments between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. has been discussed throughout the Institute, and various solutions have been tried over the years. But until recently, no widespread effort had been launched.

Now, however, several teams are taking concrete steps to spread appointments throughout the day and reduce the time adult patients wait for tests, exams, and treatments. They are doing so by modifying schedules for physicians, nurses, and infusion rooms, and by informing staff and patients about the changes. All of this is happening with the endorsement of Dana-Farber’s patient-care staff.

“We felt this was the number one quality-improvement issue to address here,” explains Lori Buswell, M.S., R.N., OCN, director of Adult Clinical Operations and Improvement. “There are days when there aren’t even enough chairs in the waiting room.”

Buswell has been collaborating with many people from various departments, see Patient waits, page 7

DFCI’s Interpreter Services program welcomes rising numbers of users

The staff of Dana-Farber’s Interpreter Services program has been exceptionally busy this past year, thanks to a dramatic rise in requests for interpreters.

Program Coordinator Eduardo Berinstein attributes the change to both increased awareness of the program – which provides verbal interpreters to patients who speak little or no English – as well as to rising numbers of patients requiring interpreters. He also credits a recent addition to the appointment-making process, IDW, with informing more staff about Interpreter Services and making it easier to seek the program’s assistance.

“When a facilitator books an appointment with a patient,” he says, “he or she can check a field on the computer screen if an interpreter is needed.”

With the assistance of facilitators, interpreters are available almost as soon as they finish speaking. It is a courtesy that Andlinger, Kantoff, and Buswell can all share.

In the Jimmy Fund Clinic one recent day, interpreter Anne Marie Owen (left) provides Arabic translation for Ara Al Quatani (seated) and his brother, Talal Al Quatani. (Steve Gilbert photo)
New EAP services available to help staff address work/life issues

When difficult situations cause stress at work or at home, staff members may turn to Dana-Farber’s Employee Assistance Program for help. The Institute recently chose Partners EAP to be its new provider of free and confidential support services to the DFCI community.

The organization, which began offering services here just last year, was chosen by a staff committee to review the Institute’s needs in this area. Partners EAP was chosen, according to committee member Angela Epstein of Cancer Immunology and AIDS, because of its strong offerings in prevention and education.

“Although we were happy with the previous vendor, CMG Associates, Partners EAP came through as the top choice,” she told managers at their monthly meeting in December. “We were impressed with the quality of its staff and its flexibility in delivering services, and the educational seminars looked great.” Another plus is that the organization has experience working in both health-care and research environments.

Partners EAP provides consultations, short-term problem solving, and referrals for work-related, family, personal, and mental-health concerns. It is staffed by licensed clinicians with expertise in issues that affect people in the workplace, including parenting challenges, depression, substance abuse, domestic violence, financial difficulties, physical illness, and workplace stress.

It is one of several options for Dana-Farber staff seeking to share personal, legal, or ethical concerns in a confidential way. The Compliance Line and Ombuds Program are two others.

Said Andrea Piraino Stidsen, LICSW, of Partners EAP, “We have a prevention and early intervention focus. We would much rather reach people early. We consider ourselves a work/life resource.”

The program will offer management consultation and training and regular work-life educational seminars at Brigham and Women’s and Massachusetts General Hospitals. The EAP will have an office at Dana-Farber, with Kathie Barnard, LICSW, serving as account manager.

To reach Dana-Farber’s EAP, call 726-6976 or toll-free 866-724-EAP. You may also call that number to arrange an orientation session for your department.

Procurement cards simplify out-of-pocket purchases

The Institute is now expanding a program that allows staff members to use a credit card to purchase lower-cost items quickly and with minimal paperwork.

In a pilot program over the past five months, about 20 employees have been using a “procurement card” – an American Express card with a Dana-Farber account – for out-of-pocket expenses.

Disbursement Manager Jack Malley says the card is especially useful for those who travel or need to pay for such items as subscriptions and emergency or internet purchases. It cannot be used for capital expenses or products over $500. The initiative is one of several emerging from the Institute’s Supply Chain Group, formed to examine possible savings in purchasing, temporary staffing, and other areas. Among its recent changes is a streamlined process for ordering office supplies and the selection of UPS as the Institute’s preferred vendor for overnight deliveries.

Under the procurement-card system, a staff member sends his or her receipts and the American Express statement to Accounts Payable within five days of receiving the statement. The Institute then covers all the charges with one check per month.

“This is not meant to replace the purchase order (PO) system,” Malley told senior managers recently. But he noted it takes his department an hour to process about 80 American Express transactions that would normally take a day-and-a-half using the Request for Payment (RFP) system.

“It’s a privilege and a benefit to have a card, but at the same time, there are responsibilities attached to make this work for everybody,” Malley said.

Added Chief Operating Officer Jim Conway, “We’re very open to having this program expand. Sometimes, pushing an RFP or PO through the system is more expensive than the product you’re buying!”

Supervisors interested in participating in the program should e-mail Malley with the names of potential users.

Do you commute to Dana-Farber from north or south of Boston? Your opinion counts!

Give CommuteWorks an hour and get lunch and a small gift

CommuteWorks needs employee opinions on two potential shuttle-bus services: commuter-hour service linking the Longwood area to North Station, and to the Red Line and future Old Colony Rail Station at JFK/UMASS.

If you drive or take the train from or near any of the towns listed below, please contact CommuteWorks at (617)-279-2796 to reserve your spot at a focus group this month. Admission is on a first-come, first-served basis, and only those with advance reservations will be accommodated.

Employees from Dana-Farber, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Children’s Hospital, and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center will all be taking part in the focus groups.

North Focus Groups:

Jan. 22, noon to 1 p.m.: BWH, Thorn Building. Thorn A Conference Room
Jan. 25, noon to 1 p.m.: BIDMC, East Campus, Shapiro Clinical Center 10th Floor Board Room
Jan. 31, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.: CH, Byers B, Enders Research Bldg., Main Lobby, First Floor

South Focus Groups:

Jan. 23, noon to 1 p.m.: DFCI, Shields Warren 111
Jan. 24, noon to 1 p.m.: BIDMC, East Campus, Shapiro Clinical Center Fifth Floor Conference Room.
Feb. 1, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.: CH, Byers B, Enders Research Bldg., Main Lobby, First Floor

Come to a North Focus Group meeting if you live North/Northwest of Boston in or near any of these towns: Acton, Andover, Arlington, Ayer, Belmont, Beverly, Billerica, Chelsea, Concord, Fitchburg, Georgetown, Groveland, Gloucester, Hamilton, Haverhill, Ipswich, Lawrence, Lynn, Marblehead, Manchester, Medford, Melrose, Merrimac, Nahant, Peabody, Reading, Revere, Rockport, Salem, Shirley, Swampscott, Wakefield, Waltham, Wenham, West Boxford, Wilmington, Winchester, Woburn

Western Mass. hosts Great Chefs event

Savor the culinary wizardry of area chefs as they conjure up magical dishes to benefit the Jimmy Fund on Friday, Jan. 26, from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.

The Great Chefs event, held in the Eastern States Exposition’s Young Building in West Springfield, Mass., will feature dishes by gourmet chefs from more than 40 premier restaurants in Western Massachusetts. Presented by People’s Bank, the event will also give guests the opportunity to bid on more than 100 select items in the Jimmy Fund silent auction, including a Florida vacation, tickets to sporting events and movies, and ski passes.

The gala has raised more than $240,000 over the last 10 years, and this year’s goal is set at $50,000.

Tickets to “Great Chefs Create Magic” are $50 for adults and $20 for children ages 12 and younger. For more information or to purchase tickets, call the Jimmy Funds Western Massachusetts Office toll-free at (888) 546-6938, or visit the Jimmy Fund Web site at www.jimmyfund.org.
Dr. D’Andrea garners award

Honors have come in bunches for Alan D’Andrea, M.D., of Pediatric Oncology during the past year.

A few months after becoming the newest Ted Williams Senior Investigator at Dana-Farber, D’Andrea has won a 2000 Distinguished Clinical Scientist Award from the Doris Duke Foundation. This award will support his research with $1.5 million in new funding over the next five years.

D’Andrea is one of seven scientists from around the country to receive the distinction. His research focuses on Fanconi anemia, an inherited disorder that causes children to develop bone-marrow failure by age 5 and leukemia or other cancers later in life. The disease is caused by a defect, or mutation, in any of eight genes within human cells.

D’Andrea’s lab has found that four of the proteins normally produced from these genes work to activate a fifth protein that accumulates in damaged portions of chromosomes, presumably to help repair the damage and prevent cells from turning cancerous. Abnormalities in any of the four “activating” proteins could, in theory, prevent repairs from taking place and set the stage for cancer.

“A better understanding of the molecular basis of this disease is likely to lead to a more rational approach to the diagnosis and treatment of Fanconi anemia patients,” D’Andrea says. “While Fanconi anemia is a rare disease, it may share some of the mutations that cause bone-marrow failures and cancers to develop in the general population. Our research therefore has the potential to benefit people with a wide range of disorders.”

The Doris Duke Distinguished Clinical Scientist Awards were established in 1999 to support investigators who have demonstrated professional leadership, excellence in clinical research, and a long-term commitment to combating human disease. The first year’s winners included Dana-Farber’s Kenneth Anderson, M.D., director of the Kraft Family Blood Donor Center and of the Jerome Lipper Multiple Myeloma Center.

Awards receive all the funding up front to provide greater flexibility in their research. At least $100,000 per year must be used to train and mentor junior physician-scientists and encourage cross-disciplinary work among clinical investigators and basic scientists.

Says D’Andrea, “This funding will allow our laboratory to collect and analyze clinical samples from Fanconi anemia patients around the world. It will also enable us to launch our gene therapy efforts for the disease.”

Andlinger continued from page 1

members who are prostate cancer survivors and their families within the past year to aid Dana-Farber’s genitourinary cancer investigations. Last winter, the Susan and John William Poduska Sr. Fund was established to bolster prostate cancer research, and the Arthur and Linda Gell Center for Translational Research in Genitourinary Oncology was created later in the year.

According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 180,400 new cases of prostate cancer were reported in the U.S. during 2000, and 31,900 men nationwide died from the disease. The risk of developing it increases with age, and more than 75 percent of all diagnoses occur in men over age 65. African-American men have the world’s highest incidence.

A Tarrytown, N.Y., businessman who came to the U.S. and Princeton University on scholarship from his native Austria, Gerry Andlinger later received his M.B.A. from Harvard University. He initially became involved with Dana-Farber in 1990, when his first wife was treated for lymphoma by George Canaflex, M.D., now medical director of Network Development for Dana-Farber/Partners CancerCare. Arntraud Andlinger died in October 1990, and the couple’s two children, Carolina and Scott, were cared for at Dana-Farber during the past year.

Their firm helped renovate the Shields Warren Building, but it was an annual gesture of goodwill – not the need for more plaster and paint – that brought representatives from William A. Berry & Son back to the structure on a snowy December day.

Joining DFCI staff, patients, and their families in the Shields Warren lobby. Berry employees – who also serve with the company’s charitable arm, the Berry Fund – played the part of elves and delivered holiday presents to the children and grandchildren of 12 patients currently undergoing cancer treatment. It was the fourth year that the Berry company, which has handled several other construction projects at Dana-Farber, has distributed gifts through its all-employee Berry Fund. Recipients were chosen by Institute social workers based on need.

“Many of you know there is a lot of generosity toward children at holiday time, but sometimes one of the populations that people don’t remember as well is the children of people who have illnesses,” Cynthia Medeiros, LICSW, director of Patient and Family Support Services, told the gathering. “Each year we give the Berry Fund a bigger list of families and present requests, and they always deliver. It’s an incredible gesture.”

For patients facing the challenges of cancer, seeing the youngsters’ faces light up with smiles as each received several presents from a huge pile beneath the Christmas tree in the lobby offered a brief respite during a difficult time.

“The day I found out I had cancer, I was devastated,” said breast cancer patient Rachel Brown-McVie as her 10-year-old grandson, Michael Brown, played with a brand-new action figure. “But they are so good to us here, you feel like you are part of a family. And for this company to do this well, it’s very special.”

The feelings go both ways. Some Berry employees have been Dana-Farber patients, and the Dana-Farber-based company has established several efforts to support the Institute. In addition to its annual gift giveaway, Berry has participated in the past eight Boston Marathon® Jimmy Fund Walks – and last year raised close to $25,000 with a 176-person squad. Then there is the “Laptop Loaner Program” run by the Berry Fund, Berry’s IT department, and the SingPositive charity, in which patients at Dana-Farber and other cancer institutes receive laptop computers so they can keep in touch with family and friends during treatment.

“We’re very proud that you not only help us build beautiful facilities like this, but that you also help us through your generosity to those who have dramatically different challenges to face,” Chief Operations Officer Jim Conway told the Berry staff. “We are struck by the fact that you have come and connected with our patients and staff in such a touching way.”

Thanks to the Berry Fund, Karina Comeo, 6 (left), and her sister Carolina, 10, have something to smile about during a holiday season made more difficult by their father Jose’s cancer treatment. (Laura Wulf photos)

Berry Fund members build holiday cheer for DFCI patients and their families

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Thanks to the Berry Fund, Karina Comeo, 6 (left), and her sister Carolina, 10, have something to smile about during a holiday season made more difficult by their father Jose’s cancer treatment. (Laura Wulf photos)
Safe medication use brochure has beginnings at Dana-Farber

Visit almost any hospital in Massachusetts and many of the state’s pharmacies and doctors’ offices, and you’re likely to find a free brochure titled Your Role in Safe Medication Use. The piece, published by the Massachusetts Coalition for the Prevention of Medical Errors, explains how patients and family members can ensure that medications are taken properly.

The origins of the brochure — now in its second printing and soon to be distributed nationally — lie in the adult Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) at Dana-Farber and Brigham and Women’s Hospital. Chief Operations Officer Jim Conway says the idea for such a pamphlet was raised at PFAC meetings a few years ago. “The council felt it was important for patients to understand that safe medication use is not just the responsibility of doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, but of patients themselves,” he remarks. “The brochure was seen as a way for patients and their families to learn about this subject.”

The idea was passed on to the Massachusetts Coalition for the Prevention of Medical Errors, a group of hospital, education, insurance, and medical professional organizations created in response to some highly publicized cases of medical error around the country several years ago.

Achievers continued from page 1

Dedicated duo

Though they work in separate areas of the Institute and hold widely different positions, Marshall and Porter-Tacoronte are alike in their dedication, willingness to go beyond the normal parameters of their jobs, and ability to serve as role models, according to those who know and work with them.

“Amy has proven herself to be a person of almost unlimited resource and endless talent,” Todd Berkman, chief administrator for the Department of Adult Oncology, wrote in nominating Porter-Tacoronte. “She is always willing to undertake new and exciting projects and always sees them through to successful conclusion.” In one instance, she assumed management of two additional disease centers while the regular program administrator was on a leave of absence.

Porter-Tacoronte, who came to Dana-Farber from Massachusetts General Hospital, where she was business manager of the Revere Health Center, administers the Thoracic Oncology Program under the direction of Bruce Johnson, M.D. She manages the operation and finances of the program and works with a staff of more than 200 in both research and clinical areas. She remarks that she repeatedly impressed with the caliber of people in her department. “They are all working toward the same goal; they have a clear sense of the mission of the Institute and how they contribute to it.”

According to Porter-Tacoronte, the Thoracic Oncology Program and the Institute’s other disease centers are embarking on a new management system that places greater emphasis on the financial bottom line. The challenge, she notes, will be to accomplish that goal while remaining true to the Institute core mission in care and research.

Marshall, who, like Porter-Tacoronte has worked at the Institute for about two years, is praised by co-workers for the personal attention she brings to her job. “Blossom is a problem-solver, helping others do the same,” wrote Elizabeth “Libby” Tracey, R.N., Ph.D., AO-CN, director of Adult Ambulatory Nursing, in her nomination letter. “She considers the priority of the patient her most important goal of each day, and the patients in association with her cite her efficiency, caring nature, and strong communication skills.”

Scheduling patient appointments, maintaining physicians’ and nurses’ schedules, and tracking a variety of financial billing forms are Marshall’s primary responsibilities. “I am still at juggling these tasks by her friendly and cordial manner with patients and staff, her colleagues attest.

It’s not surprising, then, that the aspect of her job that Marshall most enjoys is contact with patients, many of whom come to her office weekly to schedule appointments. “I have the chance to get to know some of them over time and get acquainted with their personalities,” she says.

Both Marshall and Porter-Tacoronte say they were proud and surprised to learn they’d been chosen as YMCA Black Achievers. “It’s an honor to know that my supervisor thinks I’m a role model and do a good job,” Porter-Tacoronte says. “I’ve heard of the awards before, and I’m thrilled to have won one.”

To develop the brochure, the coalition enlisted the services of the Institute for Family-Centered Care, a Bethesda, Md.-based organization that works with patients, families, and health professionals — and that was helping Dana-Farber at the time establish the patient advisory council.

The eight-page publication describes what patients can do at the doctor’s office, pharmacy, hospital, and home — to use medications safely. The advice includes learning all one can about prescribed medications, reading label directions carefully, watching for side effects, and informing physicians about other medications or herbal remedies being taken. In addition, the brochure explains that although medication errors are very rare, there are steps patients and families can take if such a mishap has occurred.

Not only did Dana-Farber help originate the brochure, but it has identified financial support for the publication’s printing and distribution.

“The best way to increase awareness is by word-of-mouth and by providing a reliable service to people,” he says. “We also have a database of everyone who uses our services. With that list, on a monthly or bimonthly basis, we’re going to send out relevant information, like articles on how to use interpreters effectively, or how to develop an awareness of different cultural issues that come into play between doctors and patients.”

To reach Interpreter Services, call (617) 375: 3673.
Patriots have a ball at DFCI

The New England Patriots aren’t headed for the Super Bowl this year, but members of the football team scored big with Dana-Farber patients and staff on a recent visit to the Institute.

During their three-hour stay on Dec. 19, linebackers Ted Johnson and Olrick Johnson, punter Lee Johnson, tight end Chris Eitzmann, and defensive lineman Reggie Grimes delighted patients, staff, and platelet donors in the Kraft Family Blood Donor Center, the Jimmy Fund Clinic, and the 11th floor adult clinic.

“You dropped the ball last week and made my dad yell at the television,” said 10-year-old David Forte upon meeting Lee Johnson. The punter took the ribbing in stride, laughing as he signed an autograph and posed for a photo with Forte.

Johnson and his teammates spent nearly an hour in the infusion areas and isolation rooms, where youngsters like 15-month-old Taye Kidd and 8-year-old Jacob Vonstein were receiving treatments that kept them away from the clinic playroom. Sitting down on beds and talking quietly with the patients and their families, the players appeared as captivated by the children as the children were by them.

On the 11th floor – their final stop – the group visited with adult patient and avid fan David Schoenfield, who was thrilled to meet a few of his heroes. The trip prompted the Patriots to put their own physical ailments, acquired on the football field, into perspective.

“We get hurt out there all the time,” reflected Ted Johnson. “But our sore knees and jammed thumbs can’t compare to what these patients go through.”

The Patriots encountered an even more enthusiastic crowd in the Jimmy Fund Clinic, where kids and their families waited for them to pass through. Dozens of tiny hands reached out to the towering players, and they reached back to touch each one.

Named after Patriots owner and DFCI Trustee Robert Kraft and his family, the blood donor center was an important stop on the team’s itinerary. Followed by an entourage of reporters and photographers from every major Boston news outlet, the players chatted and joked with platelet donors while signing hats and photos. One teammate even stopped by a private room to offer encouragement to a patient receiving platelets.

“You may not know it, but you are a huge part of what we do here,” Ken Anderson, M.D., medical director of the blood donor center, told the athletes. “The Kraft family has been front and center in our efforts for almost two decades.”

“This is exciting,” said medical technologist Betsy Bertoni as she watched the players circulate among the platelet donors. “I’ve worked here for almost 17 years, and this is one of the reasons I stay. Visits like these – along with our relationships with our amazing donors – make this job so wonderful.”

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Joe Gordon, 9, of Burlington grins from ear to ear as Patriots tight end Chris Eitzmann signs a team photo for him in the Jimmy Fund Clinic. (Karen Cummings photos)

The Gillette Centers for Women’s Cancers at Dana-Farber/Partners CancerCare and the Harvard Medical School Department of Continuing Education present:

“Regulation of Gene Expression in Developing Cortex: How Growth Factors Make You Think”

Speaker: Charles Stiles, Ph.D., Professor of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, DFCI

Tuesday, Jan. 16

“Molecular Bases of Brain Development and Brain Tumors”

Speaker: Thomas Curran, Ph.D., Chairman, Department of Developmental Neurobiology, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital

Tuesday, Jan. 10

“Deciphering HIV Pathogenesis”

Speaker: Warner Greene, M.D., Ph.D., Director, Gladstone Institute of Virology and Immunology, Professor of Medicine, University of California

Tuesday, Jan. 30

“Generation and Maintenance of Epithelial Cell Polarity”

Speaker: Ira Mellman, Ph.D., Professor of Cell Biology, Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, Yale University School of Medicine

Happenings

Labyrinth Walk
Sponsored by The Leonard P. Zakim Center for Integrated Therapies
Thursday, Jan. 18
2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Smith Family Room (D1620)

Walking the labyrinth is an ancient tool that is being rediscovered for its healing purposes. Learn how you can use this meditative method. (We will start at 2:30 with a brief discussion of the labyrinth. After that, the labyrinth will be open for your walking, so please drop by anytime, even if you can’t make it at 2:30.) For more information, contact the Zakim Center at (631) 2312.

The Gillette Centers for Women’s Cancers at Dana-Farber/Partners CancerCare and the Harvard Medical School Department of Continuing Education present:

“Current Challenges in the Management of Gynecologic Cancers”
Saturday, Jan. 27
8:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Fairmont Copley Plaza
Primary-care physicians, obstetrician/gynecologists, surgeons, and medical and surgical oncologists are invited. Advanced registration is required, and the fee is $25. For a course brochure or more information, call (800) 553-3787.

DFCI Seminars in Oncology
January 9, 16, 23, 30, 4 p.m.
Smith Family Room (D1620)

Tuesday, Jan. 9
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Speaker: Thomas Curran, Ph.D., Chairman, Department of Developmental Neurobiology, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital

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People all over the Institute found ways to celebrate during the year-end holiday season.

The Friends of Dana-Farber Cancer Institute put up decorations, sponsored a concert series in the Dana lobby, and provided a hospitality table replete with cookies, coffee, and savory cake. Performers during the lunchtime concerts included Kathryn Mannying, who soothed listeners with Celtic harp music; the Klezmaniacs, who got the room jumping with traditional eastern European melodies; and Karen Krag, M.D., and her daughter, who performed Christmas and Disney standards.

Several gingerbread houses were on display around the Institute, including a magnificent edible edifice in the Jimmy Fund Clinic crafted by Quinby Yost, daughter of Trustee George Yost (see photo, page 1).

A Kwanzaa celebration was organized by Beryl Davis, R.N., M.N., and Grace Clark, R.N., a former Institute employee who now volunteers with the Friends. Held in the Dana lobby on Dec. 28, it featured a buffet and storytelling by Zina Jacque, a doctoral student in theology at Boston University.

Several departments were inspired by the spirit of the season and threw parties of their own. The Finance Department, for example, filled its 375 Longwood Ave. hallway with food and music as corporate compliance expert Mike DeSocio grabbed his accordion and broke into song. On Dec. 18, staff and patients flocked to the Dana lobby for the annual holiday gathering hosted by longtime DFCI supporter Miriam “Mimi” Rosenblatt to thank staff for the care given her late husband, Leonard, before his 1990 death from pancreatic cancer. Lines for pastries and fruit supplied by Baker’s Best of Newton stretched down the hallway, and pianist Steve Heck—a fixture at this event—kept the mood lively with jazzed-up versions of holiday classics.

“It’s especially meaningful when a gracious, loving woman like Mimi Rosenblatt acknowledges the entire Institute with a yearly thank-you card like this,” said attendee Robert J. Mayer, M.D., who cared for Leonard Rosenblatt with Phillip Kantoff, M.D., both of Adult Oncology. “Mimi’s children have also stayed in touch with us over the years, as have members of many other families. I think that says something special about Dana-Farber.”

Dana-Farber wraps up the holidays with song, stories, and spreads

Music abounded at DFCI over the holidays. Above, Mike DeSocio (left) demonstrates his accordion skills at the Finance Department’s festivities, accompanied by Eunice Cruz (center) of Finance and Larissa Horbanczuk of DF/PCC Marketing. At left, the Klezmaniacs (and a young friend) find the Hanukkah spirit in the Dana lobby. And below, Kathryn Mannying strums the Celtic harp as part of the Friends’ concert series. (Debra Ruder, Steven Skelton photos)

Above, the camera captures two of the many staff members and guests who indulged at the annual Rosenblatt holiday party in the Dana lobby above left, Miriam “Mimi” Rosenblatt (with hat) has a laugh with Christine Coakley, R.N., M.P.H., OCN. At left, storyteller Zina Jacque impersonates her mother during a Kwanzaa celebration on Dec. 28. (Steve Gilbert and Steven Skelton photos)
Devising a plan

Although patient waits and the concentration of visits between 10 and 2 are as common nationally as sniffles in winter, the problem here became more acute after Dana-Farber combined its adult oncology services with Brigham and Women's Hospital, with outpatient services provided mainly at DFCI as of late 1997.

Patient visits have continued to climb since then. For example, the number of physician appointments for adult patients jumped some 90 percent between fiscal years 1997 and 2000, from about 36,700 to roughly 70,000 visits.

As patients began to complain about waits, the Patient and Family Advisory Council took steps to help find remedies. Last spring, the group conducted an informal survey by sitting with facilitators and tracking how long patients waited to see doctors and receive infusions. These patient advisors urged DFCI to enhance scheduling and met with staff from each disease center to share their findings. The clinical leadership embraced the council's recommendations.

Over the past few months, meanwhile, Buswell's operations group interviewed staff and analyzed data gleaned from the IDX scheduling system to get a better grip on the 10-to-2 question. They did so with help from Darby Buroker, IDX team leader in Information Services.

Staff also examined a room-use report showing how some Institute exam areas have remained underutilized during certain times of the day, and how room use can be adjusted to relieve peak periods.

Finding solutions

To help handle the increased volume on the adult patient floors – Dana 1, 9, 10, and 11 – the project leaders proposed rebuilding doctors' schedules and establishing clear guidelines for facilitators making appointments. To date, more than 100 physicians' schedules have been reshaped with their active support.

Under the new system, which took effect on Jan. 2, patients with short chemotherapy treatments may be booked more often in the afternoon (to free up mornings for longer treatments). Visits by new patients - previously held in the afternoon because they generally don't involve treatment - now may be spread throughout the day.

The remedy also limits to three the number of patients a registered nurse can treat at any one time. During their first treatment visit, patients and families now are introduced to a small team of nurses who will serve as their primary and associate nurses during their care here. This will enable DFCI to respond when one particular nurse has a busy clinic day and provide coverage when primary nurses are not available. (Adjustments will be made to accommodate emergencies, fellows' schedules, and clinical trial requirements.)

Mechanisms are also in place to monitor whether the new scheduling criteria work. In recent weeks, Quality Improvement Department staff have taken baseline measurements on clinic floors, clocking waiting times as patients move through their visits. There are also plans to survey patients and gauge informally how the day "feels" to staff and patients alike.

"This is a team effort that has involved patients, doctors, nurses, trustees, and staff," Buswell continues. "Everybody has to own this and think of ways to improve it. The ultimate goal is to provide the best care in a safe environment. These changes will, in the long run, make everybody's day better."

In addition, project members are working with the Institutes 10 adult disease centers to develop master plans that reflect each center's "vital statistics," such as the number of patients a doctor or nurse practitioner can see on a given day.

Eric Winer, M.D., director of the Breast Oncology Center, believes shifting more chemotherapy patients to afternoons and keeping infusion rooms open later (also under discussion) will help ease the crowding that has long been a concern at Dana-Farber's Gillette Center for Women's Cancers.

"There are many layers of complexity here," explains Winer. "We clearly need to fix the problem, but the fact that we have not fixed it before now points to how difficult it is. When we try to see too many people in too short a time, it makes everyone tense."

Monitoring progress

To help spread the word, meetings have been held to inform physicians, nurses, facilitators, and other staff about the changes, and information sheets for patients will be available in waiting areas. Members of the Patient and Family Advisory Council have helped coach facilitators - often the first staff to see patients inside - on responding to questions and encouraging appointments before 10 a.m. and after 2 p.m.

"[Outgoing Council Co-Chair] Joe Nies has been fabulous in going to facilitators' meetings and reminding them how important their work is," says Buswell. "He has helped empower them to say, 'Gee, I'm sorry. Dr. so-and-so is not available then.'"

Observes Nies, "It's not so much what you say but how you say it that counts." Adds Council Co-Chair Martie Carmie, "As patients, we are extremely impatient. When we come here, this is not where we want to be, we are nervous and stressed. So it's important that all the items click together to make things easier for everyone."

"We hope that by reducing crowding, we will boost patient satisfaction, provide a safer environment, and ease the stress on everybody." – Lori Buswell, M.S., R.N., OCN
The annual fall and winter migration of staff to Occupational Health Services for free flu vaccinations is well under way in the department’s offices on the first floor of the Mayer building.

Most staff have received vaccinations since they began being offered in October, says Occupational Health Nurse Pam Quinlan, R.N. A statewide shortage of the vaccine initially meant that free flu shots were available only to staff with direct patient contact, but the purchase of an additional supply from a vaccine manufacturer has made the shots available to all Institute staff.

Administrating the vaccine is one of Occupational Health’s chief responsibilities, along with performing annual tuberculosis tests for all staff members, improving safety procedures, answering general health questions, and responding to staff medical emergencies. The mix of routine duties and urgent ones mirrors that of other clinical departments in the Institute.

“No two days are alike here,” says Quinlan, a certified occupational health nurse who joined the Institute in October.

The department’s staff consists of Quinlan, half-time nurses Judy Balboni, R.N., and Rosemarie Hardman, R.N., and administrative assistant George Morris. The medical director is Arthur Skarin, M.D., of Adult Oncology, who took over the position this year after the departure of Robert Finberg, M.D., to the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. The department reports to Emily Finberg, M.D., to the University of Massachusetts Hospital, the covering physician can have him or her transferred to the emergency room at Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

The diversity of the Institute’s facilities, jobs, and workforce provides both the interest and challenge of her job, Balboni says.

“No two days are alike here.”
— Pam Quinlan, R.N.

Much of Occupational Health’s focus is on safety. If a procedure needs to be updated, or if ergonomically designed equipment can help a staff member do his or her job better, Occupational Health works with others, including the Environmental Health and Safety Department, to make the improvements. When an accident occurs, Occupational Health nurses are part of the team that investigates how to reduce chances of a recurrence. The nurses also manage workers’ compensation claims for Institute staff.

The nurses also serve on a variety of committees relating to staff health, including the Infection Control Committee, the Clinical Standards Committee, the Safety Committee, the Blood-borne Pathogen Subcommittee, the CPR Committee, and the Latex Subcommittee.

Urgent care

Accidents involving staff members transform the Occupational Health Services suite into a miniature urgent-care clinic. If a staff member slips and falls, suffers a burn, experiences chest pain, or has another problem requiring immediate medical attention, he or she is brought to Occupational Health for treatment. A rotating staff of five Dana-Farber physicians covers such cases, and an Occupational Health physician is on call for exposures to blood-borne illnesses that strike after regular business hours.

If an ill or injured staff member requires services beyond those provided by Occupational Health, the covering physician can have him or her transferred to the emergency room at Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

“As the Institute has grown,” she adds, “so have our responsibilities.”

Text by Robert Levy
Photo by Laura Wulf