



# Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology

“Caring for the whole person”

## BACKGROUND

### COMMONWEALTH HEMATOLOGY-ONCOLOGY GROWS FROM FLEDGLING PRACTICE TO NEW ENGLAND'S LARGEST CANCER CARE GROUP

*-Mission to Provide Quality Cancer Care Close to Home Remains Firm-*

During their three decades of caring for individuals with cancer, Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology (CHO) physicians have seen dramatic changes in the treatment and detection of cancer and blood diseases. Paralleling this breakthrough period is the remarkable evolution of CHO from a cluster of individual oncology practices throughout Greater Boston to one of the region's premier cancer care networks.

According to CHO President Walt Kagan, M.D., Ph.D., the roots of CHO can be traced to the 1970s, when area oncologists got together to ponder the future of health care. In the '80s, as HMOs began nudging out indemnity insurance, these informal talks took on a more serious tone as solo practitioners began to feel the squeeze of managed care. "HMOs were getting more intrusive, and small offices were struggling to take care of patients," Kagan observes. "Lower reimbursements and higher expenses were weakening community hospitals, and smaller offices were struggling to pay their nurses and take care of patients. We began to ask ourselves, 'What's the future of health care and what's the best strategy for providing community-based cancer care?'"

Although these early discussions were initially confined to informal get-togethers, they planted seeds for change that soon took root. "The benefits of sharing staff, software, centralized purchasing, and billing systems began to crystallize," says Kagan. "We came to realize that the best way to deliver high-quality, community-based care was to do it together, maximizing the synergies and economies of scale that would assure higher quality patient care."

Many of the area's oncologists kept in contact with Kagan, who established a single-physician practice in Quincy in 1981. Originally called South Shore Hematology-Oncology, it didn't take long for the practice to flourish. Within the next seven years, the office expanded to include a total of four medical oncologists. The doctors shared the vision of providing high-quality, community-based care for local cancer patients. With the additional medical staff, the practice grew substantially, necessitating a move in 1986 to a larger office at 10 Willard Street in Quincy - the site of its current headquarters. At that time, the group also opened satellite offices in Dorchester and Milton.

### **Patient Education & Support Services**

With this growth came a number of expanded patient education and support services, including the area's first breast cancer support group, "Best of Friends," in 1989. "This was the first group in the area specifically for breast cancer patients," says Kagan. "We

initiated the group because of the tremendous desire we saw among breast cancer patients to support others. Cancer can be a very isolating disease. During the 1980s, we began to see patients sharing their experiences to help each other."

### **New Name Reflects Expanded Breadth**

In 1996, the practice increased the breadth of its medical expertise by merging with two Weymouth-based oncologists. To reflect its growing prominence in the region, the practice was renamed Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology. While continuing to expand its medical corps, CHO broadened its leadership in local recovery and support services for cancer patients and their families.

The group stepped up its efforts on behalf of the American Cancer Society, with several of its physicians taking key roles in local ACS chapters. CHO also became involved in major fund-raisers, such as "Making Strides." The group was one of the first local medical practices to organize a team for the annual ACS walk.

CHO also increased its involvement in local observances such as the victim's memorial service at Quincy Hospital and the ACS' "Relay for Life" in Lawrence. In addition, CHO physicians and volunteers participate in National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and National Hospice Month. Several CHO physicians serve as medical directors of local hospices, and other doctors and nurses from the group participate in many support activities affecting cancer patients and their families.

Dr. Kagan sees increased patient and staff involvement as part of today's new thinking about cancer. "Years ago, people didn't acknowledge or even talk about cancer. Today, more support services and activities are available to encourage individuals to share their experiences with others," says Kagan.

In 1998, CHO orchestrated its largest expansion by adding six physicians from Methuen-based Oncology & Hematology Associates. In 2001, CHO established a private office practice at Emerson Hospital in Concord, where three board-certified hematologists-oncologists staff the CHO site. Later that year, CHO opened a two-physician office in Worcester. Most recently, CHO established an office in Stoneham.

Throughout the past several decades, CHO President Walt Kagan has led the group in setting new precedents in oncology care. CHO was the first medical group in the state to establish treatment guidelines for all common malignancies. It was also the first oncology practice in New England to develop specialized software for monitoring chemotherapy ordering. This software, "Intellidose," reduces the risk of drug-dosing errors and assures quality.

CHO physicians have participated in leading-edge cancer research in cooperation with many of Boston's leading academic medical centers. Dr. Kagan's articles and columns on group practice management have also appeared in several national publications.

**Commitment to Individualized Care**

During its history, CHO has remained committed to its original mission: to provide personalized, high-quality care to patients close to home. With a staff of 22 oncologists-hematologists and 30 oncology nurses and 15 office and clinic sites throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire, CHO is the largest private cancer care network in New England. It has built a solid reputation for quality and compassionate patient care.

Looking ahead, CHO plans to continue on its path of clinical excellence and leadership in community-based oncology care. Future plans include additional affiliations with major hospitals and more private office locations. The group will also continue to expand its online database for patient support services, one of the area's largest online resources for cancer patients.

For more information about CHO, call (617) 479-3550.

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