

A microscopic view of numerous spherical cancer cells, likely lymphoma or leukemia cells, characterized by their bumpy, textured surface. They are scattered across a dark teal background, with some cells in sharp focus and others blurred in the foreground and background.

# Cancer Journal

Memorial Hermann | Fall 2024

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## Survivorship

# Memorial Hermann's Breast Cancer Support Group Provides Invaluable Support to Patients and Survivors

In February 2023, Patsy Freeman Gatterson was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma after noticing a lump in her breast. She immediately started treatment, undergoing 16 rounds of chemotherapy and 30 rounds of radiation, and had a unilateral mastectomy in September of that same year. Through unwavering faith in God and determination, she proudly rang the bell on December 29, 2023, signaling the end of her cancer treatment after ten long months.

The experience was something she never expected, but looking back, she's grateful for all of it. "I tell people that at the end of the day, I would do it again," Patsy said. "The battle strengthened my faith, along with my daughter and family. I now know how to help others going through this same journey."

Alongside her faith, Patsy emphasized that she couldn't have endured the tough and exhausting treatments without the support of Memorial Hermann's Virtual Breast Cancer Support Group. She found the group invaluable not only for its emotional support but also for the first-hand perspectives and information the group provided. "Having a support group was essential because they spoke my new language, filling the gap I was missing," Patsy said. "My family loves me deeply and would do anything for me, but there were some things we couldn't discuss because they simply didn't understand."

Patsy first learned about the support group after visiting Canopy Survivorship Center, a first-of-its-kind cancer survivorship center in the Greater Houston area located on the campus of Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Medical Center.

*"We say we are 'Stronger Together' because we know how crucial it is to have support during a person's cancer journey."*

*- Shernette Sherrill, MSN*



"Canopy offers a wide variety of programs and services that address the emotional, physical, and social needs of those touched by cancer," explained Shernette Sherrill, MSN, oncology nurse navigator at Canopy. "Our goal at Memorial Hermann The Woodlands is to integrate these services into the continuum of cancer care so that we can help improve the health and quality of life of cancer patients and survivors."

It was through Canopy that Patsy was first introduced to Memorial Hermann's Virtual Breast Cancer Support

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Group, which meets via Zoom on the second Wednesday of every month. The support group is open to any patient with a breast cancer diagnosis, regardless of where they receive treatment.

“We welcome patients who are newly diagnosed, patients who have completed treatment, and are also happy to have caregivers and loved ones participate,” Shernette said. “We say we are ‘Stronger Together’ because we know how crucial it is to have support during a person’s cancer journey.”

The support group not only offers connection but also provides resources and information related to breast cancer topics, including advice for those going through active treatment. “It enables open conversation between those affected by a breast cancer diagnosis, offering hope and empowerment, and it also provides a safe space for patients to connect with others who have similar experiences,” Shernette said. “We provide vital resources, education on chemotherapy, coping tips and emotional support, and we foster a healing process that addresses long-term physical, mental, emotional and financial health following a cancer diagnosis and treatment. Ultimately, we strive to see that patients never fight cancer alone after a diagnosis.”

For Patsy, the support group has been a key component in both her emotional and physical health since her cancer diagnosis. “I did a lot of research after I was diagnosed with cancer, but to hear from someone who had actually gone through it and to get advice like how you should keep ice chips in your mouth during chemo—it was just a godsend,” Patsy said. “Being able to talk to someone about what you are going through is its own kind of healing.”

Despite finishing her treatments in 2023, Patsy has realized that she can’t simply leave her cancer diagnosis behind. Like many survivors, she has persistent side effects from her treatments and recently completed her second round of therapy at TIRR Memorial Hermann—The Woodlands for lymphedema, a common condition patients experience after breast cancer treatment.

“Ring the bell signifies the cancer is gone, but it doesn’t mean it’s over—it’s never truly over,” Patsy said. “That’s something I learned in the cancer support group. Having had cancer becomes a part of your life, and now it’s my turn to share what I’ve learned and help others. Whether you are newly diagnosed, currently fighting cancer or a survivor, I would encourage you to join a cancer support group who can speak your new language, because we really are ‘Stronger Together.’” ●





# An Innovative Therapy Combining Chemotherapy and Radiofrequency Ablation for Pancreatic Cancer Shows Remarkable Promise

In November 2020, on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, 69-year-old Thomas Paben found himself in the Emergency Center at Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital after experiencing severe nausea and lower abdominal pain. He was quickly admitted and connected to IV fluids. The emergency medicine doctor on call examined Thomas and probed the painful area. Since Thomas had his appendix removed a decade earlier, the doctor ruled out appendicitis. Suspecting an issue with the pancreas, he ordered an ultrasound and X-rays that night.

Those initial tests continued to indicate that Thomas' symptoms were likely a result of problems with his pancreas, so he was scheduled for a full diagnostic scan first thing the next morning. While the doctor refrained from alarming Thomas, he did mention the possibility of pancreatic cancer. Thomas, aware of the grim prognosis associated with this type of cancer, could barely sleep that night.

The next morning, Thomas underwent the scan. Not long after, the same emergency medicine doctor reviewed the results with him and confirmed what he had feared: Thomas had pancreatic cancer.

"It was a shock, and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't worried," Thomas said.

The doctor told Thomas that he would contact a surgeon to discuss the next steps, and just a few hours later, Thomas received a call from **Curtis Wray, MD**, a surgical oncologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann.

Within the week, Thomas met with Dr. Wray and two other physicians, who would become critical members of his medical team: gastroenterologist **Nirav Thosani, MD**, and oncologist **Putao Cen, MD**, both affiliated with Memorial Hermann. The team performed a biopsy, confirming that Thomas had a localized 3.2 cm mass, identified as Stage II adenocarcinoma. Dr. Cen also performed genetic testing, which revealed that the tumor tissue had a BRCA2 mutation, which is part of the family of HRD mutations.



On December 9, Thomas had a port placed to begin chemotherapy shortly after. This was the recommended course of action, since initial tests, which measured the tumor's size and location, indicated that it was too close to an artery for immediate surgery.

Dr. Cen started Thomas on a regimen that included chemotherapy and an oral cancer fighting drug called Olaparib, which targets for patients with BRCA2 mutated cancer like Thomas.

"While this is not the standard protocol, I found in our past experience that in tumors with HRD mutations, starting patients on Olaparib and chemotherapy prior to surgery can help substantially shrink the cancer," Dr. Cen explained.

The original plan was to use the chemotherapy and Olaparib combination for six months to shrink the tumor before considering surgical removal, but Thomas was also an ideal candidate for an innovative procedure using radiofrequency that the team was currently testing in clinical trials. After multiple examinations and discussions about the risks and benefits, he enthusiastically agreed.

With the port in place, Thomas started chemotherapy, and over the course of a few months, he underwent three radiofrequency ablation (RFA) procedures, performed by Dr. Thosani.

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“Radiofrequency ablation is a minimally invasive procedure that uses heat generated by radio waves to destroy abnormal tissues like cancer cells,” Dr. Thosani said. “Through clinical trials, we are showing that it is a highly effective treatment option with reduced recovery times compared to traditional surgical methods.”

For Thomas, the combination of the medical therapy and RFA was highly successful, shrinking the tumor substantially and allowing Dr. Wray to perform a Whipple procedure in May 2021.

“The Whipple procedure, also known as pancreaticoduodenectomy, is a complex surgery commonly performed to treat pancreatic cancer located in the head of the pancreas,” said Dr. Wray. “The procedure involves removing the head of the pancreas, part of the small intestine, the gallbladder and the bile duct. By doing so, we aim to eliminate the cancerous tissue and improve the patient’s chances of survival. Although it’s a major operation, advancements in surgical techniques and post-operative care have greatly improved patient outcomes.”

As soon as Thomas recovered from the surgery, he resumed the Olaparib and chemotherapy treatments for three more months, and in November 2022, Dr. Cen informed Thomas that she believed he was cancer-free

and no longer required oral Olaparib maintenance medication. By February 2024, he remained cancer-free, and he is now seen for monitoring every seven months. Like many patients, he has chemotherapy-induced neuropathy in his hands and feet, but he is on medication for his digestion and can eat a diet free of restrictions.

“Thomas’s determination and his trust in our treatment plan were vital to his recovery,” said Dr. Cen. “His participation in this trial also provided valuable insights and showcased the potential of targeted therapies in treating pancreatic cancer. He’s done remarkably well in his recovery and is a true success story.”

Today, Thomas and his wife stay busy on their ranch in Waller County, tending to their cattle and hay crop. They are active in local farming organizations, and his wife, looking for opportunities to stay active, had pickleball courts built in their barn. With one of the only pickleball courts in the area, their ranch has become a popular spot, and since opening it, nearly 70 people have visited for an opportunity to play.

“I am so grateful for the incredible medical care I received,” Thomas said. “The dedication and expertise of Dr. Cen, Dr. Thosani, and Dr. Wray truly saved my life, and I’m thankful for their efforts and support and the personal concern they showed for me.” ●



## Advanced Medical Treatment Leads to Remarkable Success for Stage IV Kidney Cancer Patient

At 55 years old, Griselda Castillo was a picture of health who rarely got sick. But in November of 2020, a persistent cough led her to finally see a doctor. After a

short examination, the doctor ordered X-rays, which she was able to get that same day. Before she even arrived

home from the appointment, however, she received a phone call with news she never could have imagined: Griselda had cancerous nodules throughout her lungs.

She was referred to an oncologist for further testing, which revealed that her cancer had originated with a large, 15-cm tumor in her kidney that had metastasized to her lungs and in some of her lymph nodes, with an official diagnosis of metastatic renal cell carcinoma.

"I was diagnosed with Stage IV kidney cancer," Griselda said. "It was a shock, and it was made more difficult by the fact that I was still grieving my son, who I had lost earlier that year."

The plan was to begin treatment as soon as possible, but before she could start her recommended chemotherapy regimen, Griselda contracted COVID-19.

"I got very sick very quickly," she recalled. "I couldn't eat, and I became extremely weak."

By January 8, she was rushed to Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center, where she stayed for twelve days, fighting for her life. She was unconscious for the first three days and nearly needed intubation multiple times. But thanks to her own faith and determined medical team, she survived against the odds.

Back home, Griselda needed to address her cancer. Unsatisfied with her initial care, she sought help from **Putao Cen, MD**, an oncologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann Cancer Center-Texas Medical Center, who started her on an immunotherapy treatment called Nivolumab, combined with a targeted oral cancer drug called Cabozantinib, a tyrosine kinase inhibitor (TKI). Griselda was on this combination for eight months, then Dr. Cen switched her to another combination—Pembrolizumab immunotherapy with an oral TKI drug called Lenvatinib—when this newer combination got FDA approved for better response rate and tolerance.

"The combinations represent a powerful strategy in cancer treatment by leveraging both immunotherapy and targeted therapy, said Dr. Cen. "Nivolumab or Pembrolizumab, both immunotherapy drugs, work by blocking the PD-1 receptor on T-cells, thereby preventing cancer cells from evading the immune system and allowing the body to better recognize and attack the tumor. Cabozantinib or Lenvatinib, both tyrosine kinase inhibitors, target multiple receptors involved in cancer cell growth and the formation of blood vessels that supply the tumor, inhibiting both tumor growth and survival."

When used together, Dr. Cen added, these drugs enhance overall treatment efficacy, offering a targeted approach that is significantly improving patient outcomes, even for those in advanced stages.

The immunotherapy treatment and oral chemotherapy combination worked wonders for Griselda. Within two months, 80% of the nodules in her lungs disappeared, and the tumor in her kidney began to shrink.

Despite the painful side effects that come from cancer treatment, Griselda remained determined. Over eight months, her tumor shrank to 9 cm. In the fall of 2021, she was finally ready for surgery and was referred to **Tung Shu, MD**, a urological surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center. On November 9, 2021, he performed a successful minimally invasive surgery, removing her left kidney and the tumor with it. Her recovery was quick, with minimal pain, and she left the hospital in just a few days.

After surgery, Griselda continued treatment with a lower dose combination of Pembrolizumab and Lenvatinib, and her health improved steadily. The nodules in her lungs continued to decrease, and her treatment intervals extended.

Today, Griselda is nearly cancer-free. Each CT scan brings positive news, and she continues her low-dose medical therapy to help prevent recurrence.

"Thanks to the advancement in surgical technique, surgical equipment, and post-operative care provided at Memorial Hermann-TMC, Griselda recovered from the surgery quickly and was able to resume her immunotherapy within two weeks after surgery. This is compared to the typical six to eight weeks that it takes to resume medical therapy with traditional surgical options," Dr. Shu said. "Medical therapy is the most important part of the overall treatment for patients like Griselda, so these advanced surgical techniques are allowing us to prioritize that, which tends to lead to better outcomes."

Griselda credits her survival to advanced medicine and her faith.

"I am here today because I was put in the right hands, and I never gave up," she said. "I never miss a pill or an appointment. I miss my son every day, but I still have a lot to live for, and it just wasn't my time." ●

# Early Detection Leads to Successful Outcomes in Unexpected Skin Cancer Diagnosis



In October 2023, Phil Russom woke up in the hospital and was told he had been found unconscious in his home—and that he had just undergone neurosurgery to remove a brain tumor he didn't know he had. The experience left him feeling incredibly fortunate to be alive. As he began the difficult process of recovery, one of the nurses attending to him noticed a lump on his neck. Concerned, she urged Phil to get it checked out once he had returned home and fully recovered from his near-death ordeal. Recognizing the seriousness of her concern, Phil promised that he would follow her advice.

Not long after his surgery, Phil scheduled an appointment with a dermatologist to examine the lump on his neck. During the visit, the dermatologist decided to perform a full skin check to ensure there were no other areas of concern. The examination revealed two additional issues: a lump on his upper right arm and a large mole on his upper left back, both of which raised alarms.

The dermatologist conducted tests on all three areas, and the results were shocking. Phil was diagnosed with Stage I melanoma on his upper right arm and Stage II melanoma on his back, and the lump was determined to be basal cell carcinoma.

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that develops in the melanocytes, which are the cells responsible for producing melanin, the pigment that gives skin its color. Melanoma is one of the most dangerous forms of skin cancer because it can spread to other parts of the body if not caught early. The stages of melanoma are defined based on the thickness and other features of the tumor, and whether it has spread to nearby lymph nodes or other organs. Stage I melanoma is typically confined to the skin and is usually treatable with surgery. Stage II indicates a thicker tumor that may have started to penetrate deeper layers but has not yet spread to lymph nodes.

Basal cell carcinoma is another type of skin cancer, arising from the basal cells in the epidermis, which is the outermost layer of skin. Basal cell carcinoma is the most common form of skin cancer and is generally less aggressive than melanoma. It grows slowly and rarely spreads to other parts of the body, but if left untreated, it can cause significant damage to the surrounding tissues.

Given the seriousness of his skin cancer diagnoses, Phil was promptly referred to Dr. Casey Duncan, a surgical oncologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann, for surgery.

“Surgery for removing skin cancer involves excising the tumor along with a margin of surrounding healthy tissue to ensure that all cancerous cells are removed, and sometimes a lymph node biopsy,” explained Dr. Duncan. “In cases like Phil’s, where multiple sites are affected, we carefully plan each procedure to minimize scarring and preserve function, while also prioritizing complete removal of the cancer. The goal is not only to treat the current cancer but also to prevent recurrence.”

Having grown up in Australia, a country where melanoma is common due to intense sun exposure, Phil had always been vigilant about sun protection and was fully aware of the risk of skin cancer. Because of his precautions, his own diagnosis of three cancers came as a complete shock.



"I was fair-skinned, and I used to get sunburned often, so I would always cover up and use sunscreen," Phil said. "Then, in my late twenties, I moved to Iceland, which has the lowest UV rate in the world. So, when the dermatologist told me I had not one but two melanomas, I was very surprised. I guess the message is—if it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone."

Phil was fortunate. The cancer had not spread to his lymph nodes, allowing Dr. Duncan to successfully remove all the cancerous tissue during surgery.

"The surgery was tough—I ended up with a seven-inch scar on my arm and an even larger one on my back because they had to go deep to ensure all the cancer was removed," Phil said. "But Dr. Duncan did an incredible job, and she made sure to get everything."

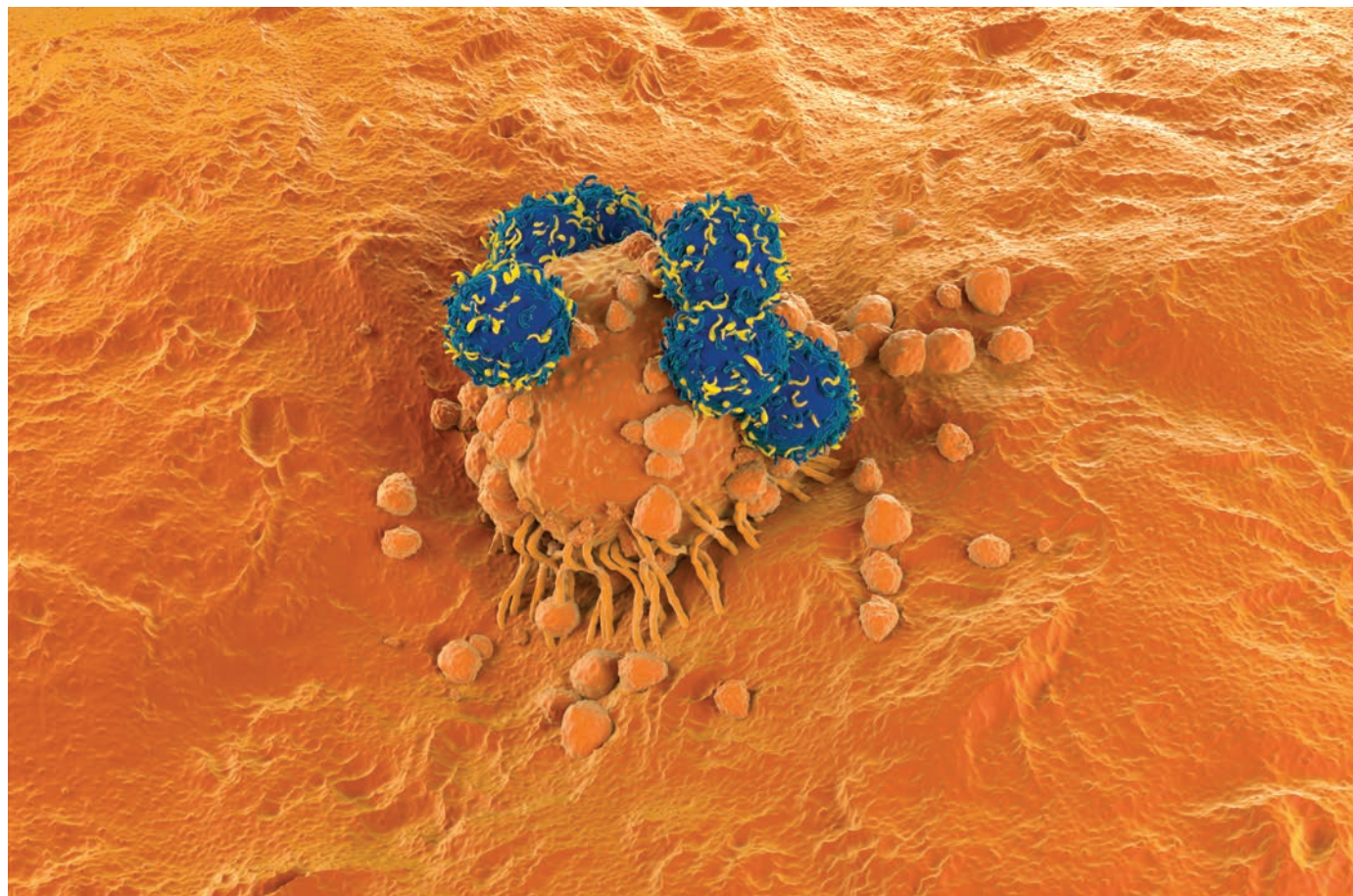
Phil joked that his only complaint is how one of the scars messed up a tattoo he'd previously had done on his arm. Despite that, he says he's "good as gold" today. By sharing his story, he hopes to emphasize the importance of protecting oneself from sun exposure and getting annual skin checks through a dermatologist.

"I've got scars, but I'm alive," Phil said. "I beat this one, but melanoma is sneaky, and you can't be too careful with it. If you have even an inkling that something doesn't look right, or if someone tells you to check something out, you should go and do it immediately."

Dr. Duncan reiterated the importance of early detection.

"Melanoma can affect anyone and any body part, regardless of age or background," Dr. Duncan said. "It's a stark reminder that no one is immune, even those who take precautions. Protecting yourself from sun exposure by using sunscreen, wearing protective clothing and seeking shade is crucial. Regular skin checks are equally important because early detection can make all the difference in successful treatment."

As for Phil, he plans to continue to protect himself from sun exposure and maintain yearly dermatology appointments, and he is grateful for the nurse who first urged him to get checked. "Had I not had my brain tumor, and had I not had that one nurse notice the lump on my neck, there is no telling where I would be today," Phil said. "I feel extremely lucky." ●



## A Place of Healing:

# How Lindig Family Cancer Resource Center Supports Patients Every Step of the Way



Dana Howell-Perkins knows the weight of the word “cancer”. Her father was diagnosed with cancer years ago.

“When you hear the “C” word, it’s a scary time. There’s so much uncertainty. You automatically feel like it’s

a death sentence. My passion, what drives me, is for people to know that is not the case,” said Dana Howell-Perkins, the oncology wellness coordinator at the Lindig Family Cancer Resource Center at Memorial Hermann Memorial City Medical Center.

Dana was by her father’s side throughout his entire journey, from doctors’ visits to treatments. Her unwavering support made a huge impact on his life. Now, four years later, he’s a survivor. In honor of her father and their journey, Dana has dedicated her life to supporting others facing similar battles. It’s a mission she fulfills daily at the Lindig Family Cancer Resource Center, a place devoted to guiding cancer patients through every step of their journey.

“As the center’s oncology wellness coordinator, I’m dedicated to creating and overseeing programs that truly support our cancer patients and survivors,” said Dana. “It’s my mission to ensure that each person who comes through our doors feels cared for, understood and empowered throughout their journey.”

The center provides comprehensive programs and resources, including education, emotional and spiritual support, available to all cancer patients, survivors and families, regardless of where they receive treatment.

“No one should feel alone on their journey, and we want everyone to know that. Our goal is to create a supportive, nurturing community. We’re here to walk alongside patients and their loved ones every step of the way, ensuring they have the resources and support they need,” said Dana.

The center had to pause in-person programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite that, it has come back stronger than ever. Not only did it reopen for in-person classes, but it also ramped up, more than doubling its available programs. Some of the programs include cancer transition classes, that support patient transitioning from treatment, creative art classes, low impact aerobics, nutrition classes, counseling and yoga.

“Our yoga instructor is not only a yoga therapist but also a cancer survivor. She can truly understand how our guests are feeling. She teaches techniques like guided meditation and deep stretches to relieve stress,” said Dana.

In addition to classes, the center offers wig fittings and provides scarves for patients. “We have a cranial wig prosthesis specialist with advanced training and expertise, allowing her to tailor each wig to the specific needs of our guests, especially those with sensitive scalps. She expertly shapes and frames the wigs to perfectly suit each individual, helping them feel both comfortable and confident,” said Dana.

Dana said they are just getting started. There’s much more planned for the future as she works to continue growing the center and its programs to fulfill its mission. After all, for Dana, this is her life’s work.

“This position is not a job; it’s a lifestyle. Every day is a new opportunity to inspire, to encourage, to help, to uplift. We want to make sure that no one feels as though they’re fighting cancer alone. That is our mission.” ●

***For more information on the Lindig Family Cancer Resource Center call 713.242.2848.***

## A note from leadership



As the season changes and we look forward to cooler weather, it is time to plan for your annual preventive cancer screenings. The fall brings prostate, breast and lung cancer awareness months so I encourage you to talk to your provider today to schedule your annual screenings.

As part of my role at Memorial Hermann, I have the privilege of leading a team of highly trained oncology nurses, most of whom are certified in oncology nursing. This team is ready to provide education, support and guidance to you and your loved ones throughout your cancer journey.

Our oncology nurse navigation team works shoulder to shoulder with Memorial Hermann affiliated cancer physicians to coordinate care and help with plans that are customized to your individual care needs. Together, our teams of specialists, inpatient and outpatient services and clinical leaders provide high-quality, evidence-based cancer care.

I am deeply grateful for all of the many cancer care providers who practice at Memorial Hermann and am so proud of the talent, skill and excellence they offer our patients.

The future of cancer care at Memorial Hermann continues to be exciting as we explore promising new technologies, convenient, home-based cancer care services and the opportunity to serve patients in new regions. And we continue to focus on developing new, innovative treatments and services for our cancer patients.

Thank you for trusting Memorial Hermann with your cancer care needs. Remember our goal is to be with you each step of the way in your cancer care. When you need us, we are here. At Memorial Hermann you will never face cancer alone.

**Sandra Miller, MHSM, RN, NE-BC**

*Vice President, Memorial Hermann Oncology Service Line*

**If you or someone you know is being treated for cancer, you can learn more about the most current resources and clinical trials available at [ClinicalTrials.gov](https://ClinicalTrials.gov) by filtering for active trials at Memorial Hermann.**



Medicine has come a long way over the years, with notable progress being made in the way physicians screen for, diagnose and treat cancer. Our knowledge and understanding of how cancer forms and grows has evolved and improved greatly over the past several decades, and this wouldn't be possible without the dedicated researchers who work

tirelessly to better understand cancer through clinical trials. The research is made possible through funding from federal grants, the pharmaceutical industry and outside funding.

Clinical trials are crucial because they offer the most advanced treatment options available. They look at new ways to prevent, detect, or treat disease. Treatments might be new drugs, new surgical procedures or devices, or new ways to use existing treatments. Carefully conducted clinical trials are the fastest and safest way to find treatments that help people.

Research conducted throughout the Memorial Hermann Health System has many benefits for health care providers and their patients, including furthering physicians' medical knowledge and improving the health of the community by providing innovative, breakthrough treatments. Participating in a clinical trial may also help other people with your disease or health condition by contributing to medical research.

Memorial Hermann research studies include many for people with cancer. Currently there are more than 5,000 patients enrolled in clinical trials being conducted throughout Memorial Hermann sites.

As we continue to expand the services of our growing cancer program in the Greater Houston area, I want you to rest assured that if you, a family member or a friend walks through our doors, you will always be our priority and will always be treated with respect from the moment you walk through our doors.

We are so grateful for the privilege to care for you and your families at every point in your cancer journey. I hope this edition of the Memorial Hermann Cancer Journal allows you to truly understand how seriously we take our jobs in providing high-level compassionate care to you and your loved ones. We hope you will join us on our journey to achieve even better outcomes in the coming years as we continue to strive to provide an experience that makes you want to come to Memorial Hermann for your health care needs.

In good health,

**Ron J. Karni, MD**

*Chief, Division of Head and Neck Surgical Oncology in the Department of Otorhinolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery  
Affiliated with Memorial Hermann*

*Chair, Oncology CPC Committee, Memorial Hermann Physicians Network*



# 2023 Annual Report

## Memorial Hermann Cancer Centers

### Letter from the Chairman



Over the past year, we’ve made significant strides at Memorial Hermann in advancing cancer care, focusing on ensuring timely and comprehensive treatment for our patients.

One of our key initiatives has been reducing the time from biopsy to the first course of treatment, particularly for breast cancer patients. Our goal is to ensure surgery happens within 60 days of diagnosis, and we’ve worked hard to make this possible. This effort has been supported by our dedicated nurse navigators, as well as improvements in our imaging processes to expedite treatment for those who need advanced imaging like MRIs due to breast density or other complexities.

I’d like to share some data that highlights the impact of our work. In 2023, Memorial Hermann diagnosed 12,507 new cancer cases and we treated 6,734 cancers across the Memorial Hermann Health System. Our clinical trials program also continues to grow, with 5,090 patients enrolled and 32 active trials available.

These numbers reflect the scale and depth of our commitment to providing high-quality cancer care.

We’ve also expanded the availability of fellowship-trained surgical oncologists into our community locations, including Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital and Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital. This expansion allows us to perform more complex procedures, such as robotic pancreatic surgeries, giving patients access to advanced treatments closer to home.

All of these efforts demonstrate our ongoing commitment to improving the experience and outcomes for our cancer patients. Whether it’s through faster imaging, timely surgeries, clinical trials or expanding our expertise in community hospitals, we are working hard to ensure every patient receives high-quality care.

I’m incredibly proud of the progress we’ve made and look forward to continuing these efforts in the coming year.

Sincerely,  
**Emily Robinson, MD, FACS**  
*Chair, Memorial Hermann Integrated Network Cancer Committee*

### 2022 Memorial Hermann Cancer Incidence as a Percentage of Cancer Patient Population vs. American Cancer Society Estimates

#### Estimated new cases

Male	MHHS	ACS
Prostate	19%	27%
Lung & Bronchus	11%	12%
Colon & Rectum	13%	8%
Urinary Bladder	5%	6%
Kidney & Renal Pelvis	6%	5%
Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma	4%	4%
Oral Cavity & Pharynx	5%	4%
Leukemia	4%	4%
Pancreas	4%	3%



Female	MHHS	ACS
Breast	36%	31%
Lung & Bronchus	8%	13%
Colon & Rectum	8%	8%
Uterine Corpus	6%	7%
Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma	3%	4%
Pancreas	3%	3%
Kidney & Renal Pelvis	3%	3%
Leukemia	2%	3%



Source: Cancer Facts & Figures 2022

## Letter from the Cancer Liason Physician



In my role as the Cancer Liaison Physician (CLP) for Memorial Hermann's Integrated Network Cancer Committee and Memorial Hermann Greater Heights, I have the privilege of helping our hospital system stay aligned with national standards set by the Commission on Cancer (COC).

My role as a CLP is to act as a bridge between the COC and our integrated network throughout the Memorial Hermann Health System, ensuring that we stay up to date with the latest developments in cancer care. This involves educating our hospital staff on changes in standards and attending conferences, such as the COC's annual meeting, to bring back valuable insights.

I am proud to share that Memorial Hermann Greater Heights Hospital has been reaccredited by the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NAPBC). This reaccreditation is an important achievement, as it reaffirms our commitment to providing exceptional care to breast cancer patients. In working closely with our cancer programs, I have seen the dedication and hard work that goes into meeting the rigorous standards set by the NAPBC.

One of the distinct benefits in my role as CLP is the opportunity of keeping abreast of new developments in cancer care that are constantly changing at a rapid pace, and they will continue to do so. Through our

involvement with the COC there is access to cutting-edge research, invaluable information provided through the National Cancer Database (NCDB) and the latest treatment standards disseminated which helps our system as a whole stay informed on emerging trends and best practices. In attending the annual national COC meeting, I am regularly afforded the opportunity to engage with experts and colleagues, sharing concerns unique to our hospital system and in return conveying insights to our integrated program. This continuous learning not only enhances my personal practice but also promotes a valuable dialogue between the COC and the Memorial Hermann network, ensuring we deliver the most advanced and effective cancer care possible. In this field, we never stop learning, and that's what makes the work so rewarding.

As a Cancer Liaison Physician, I am afforded the opportunity to see distinct accomplishments of our system's affiliated cancer team as we work together to meet and exceed the highest standards in cancer care. Knowing that I contribute to a team dedicated to continuous improvement and achieving such impactful results for our patients is both inspiring and deeply rewarding.

Sincerely,

**Mike Ratliff, MD**

*CLP, Memorial Hermann Integrated Network Cancer Committee*

*CLP, Memorial Hermann Greater Heights Hospital*

*Affiliated with Memorial Hermann*

## Memorial Hermann Cancer Care By the Numbers



**12,507**

*Newly diagnosed cancers at Memorial Hermann*



**6,734**

*Cancers seen in the Memorial Hermann Health System*

**644**

*Tumor boards held*

**5,398**

*Cases presented*



**5,090**

*Patients enrolled in clinical trials*



(FY24 data): data source is from Integrated Cancer Committee report from Research Coordinator



**32**

*Active Clinical trials available*

## Excellence in Cancer Care

# Navigating Cancer and Pregnancy through Personalized Care

Last August, Sarah and Brandon Lejeune of Lafayette, LA., were eagerly hoping to welcome a third child into their loving family. But just as Sarah began to suspect she might be pregnant, she became increasingly concerned about her own health. Troubled by chest pains and an unusual sensation of a lump in her throat, she decided to consult her local doctor.

The initial tests, including X-rays and an ultrasound of the affected area, suggested something alarming—Sarah might have cancer, specifically lymphoma. To confirm the diagnosis, she underwent further testing, including a CT scan, MRI, biopsy and a pregnancy test.

Within one week, Sarah received life-changing news: she was indeed pregnant—a dream come true—but she also had lymphoma.

“It was an emotional whirlwind, and we were so excited about the baby, so I was ready to do whatever I had to,” Sarah said.

Sarah was connected with a local oncologist in Lafayette and also consulted with cancer specialists in Houston. They determined that chemotherapy was necessary, but to protect her baby, they recommended delaying treatment until her second trimester.

Unfortunately, Sarah’s cancer was aggressive and rapidly deteriorated her health. By October, she was hospitalized as the cancer spread, making it difficult for her to breathe or swallow, and fluid began accumulating around her heart.

“I was essentially on my deathbed,” Sarah recalled. “My heart and lungs were damaged, and my oxygen levels were plummeting. I was on a ventilator and unconscious—it was an incredibly frightening time. They made the decision to start chemotherapy as a last-ditch effort to save both me and my baby.”

Against mounting odds, Sarah and her baby both survived. She continued chemotherapy, but the journey was far from over. After the first round, her





cancer swelled, crushing her trachea which necessitated emergency surgery to reopen her airway. Following the second round of chemotherapy, her cancer began to recede, but it left behind a fistula—a hole between her trachea and esophagus. At that point, her local doctors deemed her case too complex and recommended she travel to Houston for specialized care.

At the cancer hospital, Sarah's doctors closely monitored her condition and decided to delay surgery on her fistula until after her baby was born. They inserted a feeding tube to ensure she and her baby received the calories and nutrients they both needed. However, at 20 weeks' gestation, her doctors recognized the need for specialized care not just for her cancer but also for her baby. She was transferred to Memorial Hermann Cancer Center-Texas Medical Center, where she was placed under the care of oncologist Dr. Adan Rios and the hospital's Acute Leukemia and Pregnancy Program, a collaborative effort between the hospital's Oncology Division and Dr. Rios and Dr. Sara Taveras Alam, and the Maternal-Fetal Medicine High-Risk Pregnancy Program, with Dr. Sean Blackwell, Dr. Rachel Newman and Dr. Baha Sibai.

"Treating cancer in a pregnant woman presents unique and complex challenges," Dr. Rios said. "We have to carefully balance the urgency of addressing the cancer with the need to protect the developing baby. Every decision, from the timing of chemotherapy to the monitoring of both mother and child, requires meticulous planning and coordination across multiple specialties. It's not just about treating the cancer; it's about ensuring the best possible outcome for both the mother and baby, which can often involve difficult decisions and a constant reassessment of risks and benefits throughout the pregnancy."

Over the following months, Sarah completed her chemotherapy while also receiving specialized OB/GYN care. In addition, she suffered multiple bouts of pneumonia because her fistula made it easy for bacteria to get into her lungs. She was grateful for Dr. Rios, who not only guided her through her chemotherapy, but who made himself available for all her medical concerns. "I would call him and explain I had another fever, and he would tell me exactly what to do," Sarah said. "It was such a difficult time, but it was so comforting knowing I had someone with his knowledge and expertise whenever I needed it."

A few weeks after completing her chemotherapy, Sarah's OB/GYN affiliated with Memorial Hermann scheduled a C-section, and on March 14, 2024, her daughter Catherine was born at just 32 weeks. As a premature baby, Catherine required specialized care in the NICU at Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital to continue growing and developing. During this time, Dr. Rios ensured that Sarah's health was also prioritized.

"We couldn't do a PET scan while I was pregnant, so we didn't know if I was cancer-free after the chemotherapy treatments, but we suspected they had worked because the swelling went down almost immediately after I started treatment," Sarah said.

Dr. Rios coordinated transfer for Sarah back to the cancer hospital, where she was able to get the PET scan and was declared in remission. She also finally had the surgery to repair the fistula, which was the last major step in her own recovery.

Soon after, Catherine was discharged from the NICU at Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital, and the Lejeune family was finally able to go home.

"Besides being premature, Catherine was a picture of health, even with all the chemotherapy I had during my pregnancy," Sarah said. "She's a happy and perfect baby, growing bigger and stronger by the day."

As for Sarah, the whole experience feels like a blur, but she's thankful every day that she no longer has a feeding tube and can eat and drink again.

"Everything was a success," Sarah said. "My scans continue to be clear, and life is back to normal—I get to be a mom again, which feels surreal after everything we went through this past year."

Sarah added that she and her family will be forever grateful to Dr. Rios, his team, and everyone at Memorial Hermann for the above-and-beyond personalized care they provided.

"Dr. Rios was incredible—always available whenever we needed him," Sarah said. "Every time I went in for bloodwork and checkups, I saw him face-to-face, and his nurses were always there and supportive and attentive. He provided immense comfort not only to me but also to my husband and my mom. Everyone, from the nurses to the other doctors, truly cared for us." ●

## Enhancing Cancer Care:

# Memorial Hermann's New Behavioral Health Program



A cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming. Patients often find themselves suddenly navigating numerous obligations to treat their condition, including doctor visits, dietary changes, radiation, chemotherapy and even surgery.

"A cancer diagnosis often involves a whirlwind of appointments and treatments, making it physically taxing," said **Sangeeta Srivastava Awasthi, MD**, a board-certified psychiatrist affiliated with Memorial Hermann.

While addressing the diagnosis and treating the cancer is crucial, coping with the diagnosis also has a significant impact on mental health, something Dr. Awasthi knows firsthand.

"As a breast cancer survivor myself, I understand what patients are experiencing physically, mentally and emotionally," said Dr. Awasthi.

Dr. Awasthi has had a long career as a psychiatrist but her personal experience with cancer led her to shift her focus. She chose to specialize in onco-psychiatry, dedicating her practice to supporting cancer patients by helping to improve quality of life.

"This is my calling," Dr. Awasthi explained. "I feel like I can give something meaningful back to the cancer community by offering support and understanding to help cancer survivors become thrivers".

With that mission in mind, Dr. Awasthi was instrumental in establishing the behavioral health program at the Lindig Family Resource Center at Memorial Hermann Memorial City Medical Center in January of 2024, an initiative focused on enhancing the mental and emotional well-being of cancer patients. ●

## A Holistic Approach to Cancer Care

The behavioral health program at Memorial Hermann takes a comprehensive, holistic approach to cancer care, with medication management and counseling.

Dr. Awasthi offers one-on-one sessions with patients and their families. The program is designed to not only support patients in their fight against cancer but guide them in living fully and meaningful lives both during and after their treatment.

“Too often, we focus solely on the physical aspects of cancer, like getting rid of the tumor or managing pain, but we may overlook the impact cancer has on our mental health,” said Dr. Awasthi. “How we feel emotionally can significantly impact our overall health and recovery.”

The program is also expanding to include group sessions and virtual educational lectures focused on survivorship and “thrivership,” with the goal of helping patients find a new normal for themselves and relearn how to find meaning in each day.

The behavioral health program is designed to help patients enhance their well-being during their cancer journey by focusing on various aspects of mental health and connection. In addition to therapy sessions, the program offers activities such as yoga, mindfulness and art therapy to nurture both the mind and soul. These initiatives aim to empower patients to not only manage their diagnosis but also to find strength and joy as they move forward in their lives.

“At Memorial Hermann, our goal is to teach patients how to live life fully and to enjoy each moment despite the challenges they face,” Dr. Awasthi emphasized.

Dr. Awasthi’s dedication to this work is deeply personal. Having walked the path herself, she understands the profound impact that mental and emotional support can have on a patient’s journey. Her commitment is driven by a desire to ensure that every patient feels empowered and supported, not just in battling their illness, but in reclaiming their life and well-being.

“This work is my calling and I’m incredibly grateful to give back as a cancer survivor,” she said. “My goal is to help every patient feel supported throughout their journey.” ●

**To learn more about the behavioral health program at the Lindig Family Resource Center call 713.242.2848.**

## Navigating Cancer with Compassion:

# Memorial Hermann’s Nurse Navigators

A cancer diagnosis is overwhelming. As patients grapple with the emotional and mental impact of hearing the word “cancer,” they are quickly swept into a whirlwind of appointments, doctor visits, medications and treatments. Navigating this complex process can be daunting, but at Memorial Hermann nurse navigators are there to ease the strain. By managing logistical challenges and providing comprehensive support, nurse navigators allow patients to focus on their recovery and well-being.

“The nurse navigation team really is the fulfillment of our vision at Memorial Hermann that no one faces cancer alone,” said **Sandy Miller**, vice president of the Oncology Service Line at Memorial Hermann Health System. “These nurses coordinate and enhance seamless cancer care with their primary goal being to remove barriers to care.”

Oncology nurse navigators impact thousands of lives each year. Last fiscal year alone, they served more than 10,800 patients, facilitating 25,800 visits. The number of oncology nurse navigators has grown significantly in the past eight years, underscoring Memorial Hermann’s investment in this vital resource.

“The fact that we’ve grown from seven or eight navigators to now almost 22 really speaks to the investment and resources we’ve garnered for this program because it has demonstrated its value year over year,” Miller added.

Nurse navigators are there through every step of the process. For newly diagnosed patients, they provide critical information about their diagnosis and what to expect throughout treatment. The support continues throughout the patient’s journey. Nurse navigators do everything from arranging transportation to coordinating visits with chaplains or social workers, helping to remove obstacles so patients can focus on their health.

“Something as simple as needing a ride for treatment can mean a patient doesn’t get the care they need. Our nurse navigators connect patients with transportation, accommodations, social workers and oncology behavioral

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health specialists to ensure nothing stands in the way of their care,” she explained.

Oncology nurse navigators’ roles go beyond the walls of the hospital. They help patients feel supported in every aspect of their care, mentally and physically. “These nurses are great listeners and communicators. They alleviate patients’ fears and concerns, helping them through one of the hardest things they will ever face,” said Miller.



“The oncology nurse navigators serve as the liaison and patient advocate that connects the patient with the care teams and resources they need. We partner with many organizations to ensure the patients’ needs are met. We are here to support them throughout their entire

cancer journey, and it really is so rewarding,” said **Mandy Owens, RN**, manager of clinical oncology nurse navigation for Memorial Hermann System Services. The nurse navigators are oncology specialized and

certified. This ensures that patients are well educated, supported and empowered to make informed decisions regarding their care.

“This really speaks to the breadth of care a patient receives. Not only do we have nurse navigators that support patients with specific cancers, but we also care for any cancer patient that comes through our doors,” said Miller.

The program’s impact is profound. Patients continually praise the relief it provides during such an emotionally and physically taxing time.

“Patients often credit our nurse navigators with helping them beat cancer,” said Owens. “There’s a survey that we use at Memorial Hermann that examines patient experience based on their feedback. Our navigation team consistently receives the highest score in the system, reflecting the immense value patients place on this service.” ●

Our team of specialized oncology nurse navigators continually strives to provide the highest quality of care and education to patients throughout the cancer journey. Participation in conferences, speaking engagements and earning advanced degrees are just a few of the ways our nurses stay informed and continue to grow professionally.

“The work our oncology nurses do every day is crucial to the outcomes of our patients and to our mission as a whole,” says Shelita Anderson DNP, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, OCN, Oncology patient care director, Memorial Hermann Health System. “Having a presence in the professional community and earning certifications and advanced degrees supports our roles as leaders and enables our team to gain valuable skills that will translate into their roles.”

## Did You Know? This year, our oncology nurse navigators:

Completed **6**  
nursing oncology  
presentations at conferences

Presented abstracts at  
Oncology Nursing  
Society podiums **4**

**2** oncology nurse leaders  
earned doctorate degrees in FY24

**48.3%** became oncology  
certified

**492** earned chemotherapy  
certification

# Memorial Hermann Greater Heights Hospital Recognized for Excellence in Cancer Care with ACS Accreditation

Memorial Hermann Greater Heights Hospital has recently been accredited by the American College of Surgeons (ACS) Commission on Cancer (CoC), a significant acknowledgment of the hospital's dedication to providing top-tier cancer care. This prestigious accreditation highlights the hospital's commitment to continually improving cancer treatment and outcomes, providing patients with comprehensive, high-quality care throughout their cancer journey.

The ACS CoC is a nationwide consortium focused on enhancing survival rates and quality of life for cancer patients. Through setting and enforcing rigorous

standards, the ACS CoC certifies that accredited institutions like Memorial Hermann Greater Heights are consistently delivering exceptional care. This accreditation is not merely a certificate; it is a reflection of the hospital's ongoing efforts to meet the highest standards of cancer treatment.

To maintain accreditation, cancer programs undergo a thorough site visit every three years, including an evaluation of their compliance with a wide range of quality measures. These programs must demonstrate their ability to provide a full spectrum of services, from diagnostic procedures to supportive care. ●



## Elevating Cancer Care with Surgical Quality

Beyond its CoC accreditation, Memorial Hermann Greater Heights has also earned the designation of a Surgical Quality Partner. This title signifies the hospital's dedication to refining and improving its surgical procedures, while also maintaining a critical eye on the process. By consistently examining and improving their processes, Surgical Quality Partner hospitals like Memorial Hermann Greater Heights give patients confidence that they are receiving care by a team of medical professionals who are dedicated to self-improvement, while also adhering to the most rigorous standards in surgical quality.

In an era where healthcare excellence is paramount, the hospital's recent accolades reflect its commitment to the community and to the advancement of cancer care.

With both its ACS CoC accreditation and its designation as a Surgical Quality Partner, Memorial Hermann Greater Heights is poised to continue setting the bar for high-quality, patient-centered care. This recognition not only speaks to the hospital's past achievements but also to its future aspirations in delivering the best possible outcomes for patients facing cancer. ●

## Enhancing Cancer Care Through Accountable Care Organizations:

### A Focus on Quality and Coordination

Memorial Hermann and its oncology team are continually striving to elevate the standard of care, always aiming to do better and more for their patients.

“You go through a tough time with cancer, and we want to ensure we do everything to make that journey easier and that means focusing on every detail of your care,” said **Ron Karni, MD**, physician leader of the Oncology program of the Memorial Hermann Accountable Care Organization (ACO).

This mission is the driving force behind the creation of the Memorial Hermann ACO Service Line programs. An ACO is a health care model designed to improve the quality of care for patients while reducing unnecessary costs. It is a network of doctors, hospitals and other health care providers who voluntarily collaborate to deliver coordinated, high-quality care, particularly to patients.

Dr. Karni emphasizes that Memorial Hermann has taken a pioneering approach in cancer care by establishing one of the first cancer-specific ACO programs in the country.

“What makes our Oncology ACO program truly unique is that it goes beyond traditional care models by focusing on the entire journey of the cancer patient. We’ve pioneered a system where the quality of care is paramount, incentivizing our physicians not just to treat the disease but to enhance every aspect of the patient’s experience. This approach allows us to deliver top-tier care with fewer complications, setting a new standard in oncology,” Dr. Karni explained. ●

*“We’ve pioneered a system where the quality of care is paramount, incentivizing our physicians not just to treat the disease but to enhance every aspect of the patient’s experience.”*

*- Ron Karni, MD*





# How Memorial Hermann's Cancer ACO Program Works

Each year, members of the Oncology ACO program set specific metrics, goals and objectives designed to enhance the quality of care, improve patient outcomes and reduce costs. These goals are closely aligned with the efforts of the Memorial Hermann Cancer Registry, the Commission on Cancer (CoC) and the Memorial Hermann Integrated Network Cancer Committee (INCC). Throughout the year, ACO members meet to assess their progress, discuss successes and identify areas for improvement.

"These ongoing meetings allow us to track our progress, refine our strategies and ensure that we're consistently delivering the highest quality of care to our patients," said Dr. Karni.

Some of the ACO's initiatives are reflected in the everyday experiences of patients. One key mission of the ACO program has been to expand the number of nurse navigators at Memorial Hermann. Nurse navigators play an essential role in guiding patients through the complexities of their cancer care. They provide comprehensive support, assisting with everything from arranging transportation to scheduling appointments and ensuring patients have access to any other resources they may need throughout their treatment journey.

Another vital resource facilitated by the Oncology ACO program is the integration of rehabilitation services. Patients undergoing cancer treatment often face physical challenges that require specialized rehabilitation to regain their strength and functionality. The ACO leverages the resources of Memorial Hermann's renowned rehabilitation hospital, TIRR Memorial Hermann, to ensure that patients have access to these essential services. This focus on rehabilitation helps patients recover more quickly and return to their daily lives with improved physical and emotional well-being.

These initiatives highlight just some of the ways the Oncology ACO program is enhancing patient care, with the mission advancing every single day. "It speaks to our relentless pursuit of quality when it comes to patient care. What sets Memorial Hermann apart is its commitment to ensuring success and improving the quality of the journey for each patient," said Dr. Karni.

**Nirav Thosani, MD**, a gastroenterologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann and a key contributor to the Oncology ACO program's development, emphasized the holistic approach of the program.

"Our focus is on providing comprehensive care that not only addresses the medical needs of our patients but also supports their overall well-being throughout their cancer journey," said Dr. Thosani.

The Oncology ACO program began with 60 physicians in 2020 and has grown to more than 150 participants by 2024, with specialists from various fields contributing to the comprehensive management of patients throughout their cancer journey.

"The growth of the Oncology ACO program reflects our commitment to assembling a diverse team of specialists who can address every aspect of cancer care," said Maria Tran, director of System Cancer Registry at Memorial Hermann. "By expanding our network, we enhance each patient's ability to receive comprehensive, coordinated support from diagnosis through every step of their journey, making a meaningful impact on both outcomes and patient experiences."

As Memorial Hermann continues to innovate and expand its Oncology ACO program, each step strengthens patient care today and shapes the future of cancer treatment for years to come. ●

*"Our focus is on providing comprehensive care that not only addresses the medical needs of our patients but also supports their overall well-being throughout their cancer journey,"*

*- Nirav Thosani, MD*

## Memorial Hermann's Commitment to Breast Cancer Care:

### Ensuring Timely Treatment



At just 13 years old, Arlene Ricardo experienced a loss that would shape her entire future: her mother died from breast cancer at the age of 47. While the loss was devastating, it had a profound impact on Ricardo's life, inspiring her to become a breast surgeon.

"I feel deeply honored to do what I do. It is incredibly rewarding to know that you're saving lives," said **Arlene Ricardo, MD**, a breast surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann.

Dr. Ricardo has been transforming lives as a breast surgeon at Memorial Hermann for almost 25 years. Throughout her tenure, she has witnessed remarkable advancements in technology and treatment. However, one thing that has remained constant is the doctors and nurses' unwavering commitment to provide high-quality care.

"Their passion and commitment to our patients is truly remarkable," said Dr. Ricardo.

#### Commitment to Excellence

As part of Memorial Hermann's commitment to excellence, the oncology team's affiliated doctors, nurses and leadership continuously assess and evaluate the system's processes, focusing on what's working well while identifying opportunities for growth and improvement. One primary focus is ensuring that following a breast cancer biopsy, surgical intervention takes place within 60 days for patients in cancer stages I, II or III.

"We know that ensuring timely surgical intervention within 60 days of a patient's biopsy improves patient outcomes both mentally and physically. Timely care reduces stress, promotes quicker recovery and has the potential to increase the effectiveness of treatments," said Dr. Ricardo.

The effort to achieve timely surgical intervention begins with the Memorial Hermann oncology nurse navigators;

a dedicated group of nurses certified in oncology that prioritize streamlining patient care. As part of the 60-day initiative, the nurse navigators track the progress of each patient's treatment, including appointments for imaging, surgical consultations and visits with surgeons and other specialists. By meticulously monitoring these timelines, the nurse navigators strive to see that patients receive expedited care while also identifying opportunities for continual improvement.

"This quality measure directly improves patient outcomes and survival. The team works diligently to help each patient has access to the safe, quality and timely care that they deserve," said **Mandy Owens, RN**, manager of clinical oncology nurse navigation for Memorial Hermann System Services.

In addition to expediting appointments, the oncology nurse navigators have streamlined communication efforts. Constant communication between oncologists, surgeons, radiologists, nurse navigators and other specialists helps patients receive customized, timely care.

Furthermore, nurse navigators assist in improving access to care while also providing educational opportunities and support throughout the entire cancer journey. This comprehensive approach enhances the overall patient experience and promotes better outcomes.

"We do what we do because we want women to survive, to live long, healthy lives and to see their grandchildren grow up. There's a deep emotional attachment to our patients and we are wholly committed to their well-being," said Dr. Ricardo.

Although times have changed over the past 25 years, the mission remains the same and Dr. Ricardo is dedicated to achieving that mission every day.

"My mother's passing set me on this path. If her struggle could inspire me to save even one life, then there was a purpose to it. We've made tremendous strides over the past 40 to 50 years, and I am committed to ensuring that our patients receive high-quality care," said Dr. Ricardo. ●



## Dr. Adan Rios Honored by Panama with State-of-the-Art Cancer Institute Naming

The National Government of Panama and the Caja del Seguro Social have honored **Adan Rios, MD**, an oncologist affiliated with

Memorial Hermann, by naming the country's newest cancer institute after him. **The Institute of Cancerologia Dr. Adan Rios Abrego** was officially inaugurated on June 27 at the City of Health in Panama City.

This state-of-the-art medical spans over 226,000 square meters on a plot of 319,000 square meters. The complex includes four high-level hospitals, five specialized institutes and four surgery-operating centers, all equipped with the latest technology and staffed by highly qualified medical professionals. The institute will service specialty units including pediatrics, rehabilitation and critical care.

The cancer institute will also offer clinics for radiation oncologists, surgical oncologists, specialist doctors, nurses, and oncology assistants, along with internal and general medicine physicians, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists. The hospitalization

area will initially provide 132 beds with the capacity to expand to more than 200.

"I am deeply honored and humbled. This institute represents a significant advancement in cancer care for Panama and the region and I am proud to be associated with such a groundbreaking facility. It is my hope that this center will inspire innovation, provide exceptional care and offer hope to countless patients and their families," said Dr. Rios.

Dr. Adan Rios is internationally renowned for his work in HIV-associated malignancies and the treatment of tumors with biological response modifiers. A medical oncologist with a special interest in lymphoma, leukemia and immune-compromised related malignancies, Dr. Rios has received numerous awards and distinctions throughout his career. These include the 2001 University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center Distinguished Alumnus Award, the 2003 George Washington University Presidential Medical Award and the 2008 UTHealth Houston Science Center Minority Services Award. ●

### Enhancing Cancer Care Through Collaborative Leadership:

## The Role of Memorial Hermann's Oncology Governance Council

At Memorial Hermann, communication and collaboration between affiliated physicians and leadership are essential to delivering exceptional patient care. To support this mission, affiliated physicians and oncology leadership regularly meet through the Oncology Governance Council. These meetings provide a forum for exchanging ideas, exploring new technologies, and working across specialties to share insights, address challenges and continuously improve patient care.

"The Oncology Governance Council is truly an opportunity to bring together oncology leadership and affiliated

physicians. Whether you are part of Memorial Hermann's cancer program in academics or private practice, whether you're an oncologist, radiation doctor, surgeon or even working in the rehabilitation space, this council unites us all," said **Ron Karni, MD**, chair of the Oncology Governance Council at Memorial Hermann.

### Collaborative Excellence in Oncology

During the governance meetings, affiliated oncology physicians come together to evaluate what's working and pinpoint areas for improvement. These discussions

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involve physicians from across the Greater Houston area, from Katy to Kingwood and everywhere in between.

“When we all come together as a team, it fosters idea generation, helps us identify what’s working and highlights areas for improvement. It also encourages collaboration among us. Having leadership present is invaluable, as they not only support the affiliated physicians but also offer their expertise and guidance,” said Dr. Karni.

**Yuval Raizen, MD**, shared a similar perspective. He is a community oncologist that is part of the executive team. He is also a Memorial Hermann affiliated physician and a member of the Oncology Governance Council.

“As an oncologist working together with the Memorial Hermann system, being part of the Oncology Governance Council has really allowed the integration of a community-based practice into the larger system. It offers a valuable platform to share ideas and collaborate with

physicians from across the Greater Houston area. This kind of connection allows us to advance patient care together, both in the hospital-based and community setting,” said Dr. Raizen.

In addition to serving as a platform for communication and growth, the Oncology Governance Council also provides an opportunity to evaluate emerging technologies with oncology leadership.

“If there’s a new technology we want to implement, we bring it to the Oncology Governance Council, make our case and work together to build consensus on the next steps. This collaborative process is at the heart of what the council does,” Dr. Karni explained.

Furthermore, the Oncology Governance Council takes time to recognize and celebrate accomplishments within the system. Each month, a different oncology specialty presents to the group, with affiliated physicians and experts sharing updates on their field. These presentations provide valuable insights into the latest developments, whether in breast surgery, colon cancer or innovative technologies.

“What truly sets the Memorial Hermann cancer program apart from other cancer programs in the city and region is our collaborative approach. We are a unified group of physicians, and the success of the Oncology Governance Council reflects that unity. It fosters strong connections

among us and ensures our physicians feel supported. Ultimately, everything we do is centered on the patient, enhancing the care experience for everyone we serve every day,” said Dr. Karni. ●



A **QUALITY PROGRAM**  
of the AMERICAN COLLEGE  
OF SURGEONS

### **Memorial Hermann Cancer Program Accreditation**

All eight Memorial Hermann Cancer Centers are Accredited by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer (ACoS CoC). Only 25% of hospitals across the country have received this special recognition. This approval means our Centers meet national standards that have been established to ensure cancer patients receive the best care. Commission accreditation is given only after thorough onsite evaluation process and performance review. To maintain approval, our Centers undergo an onsite review every three years.

### **Memorial Hermann Earns National Reaccreditation for Rectal Cancer**

The rectal cancer programs at Memorial Hermann Memorial City, Memorial Hermann Southeast and Memorial Hermann The Woodlands have been awarded reaccreditation by the National Accreditation Program for Rectal Cancer (NAPRC).

The NAPRC was developed through a collaboration between the OSTRiCh Consortium (Optimizing the Surgical Treatment of Rectal Cancer) and the Commission on Cancer (CoC), a quality program of the American College of Surgeons. The NAPRC's goal is to ensure patients with rectal cancer receive appropriate care using a multidisciplinary approach.

“We are extremely happy to now have three facilities with NAPRC accreditation,” said Dr. Joseph Cali, Jr., colorectal surgeon, who is affiliated with Memorial Hermann. He also is the Memorial Hermann Health System Rectal Cancer Director and the Rectal Cancer Program Director at Memorial Hermann Memorial City. “These Centers of Excellence follow the nationally set standards by the American College of Surgeons for the treatment of rectal cancer.”



*Accreditation by the NAPRC is granted only to those programs that are voluntarily committed to providing the best possible care to patients with rectal cancer. Each rectal cancer program must undergo a rigorous evaluation and review of its performance and compliance with NAPRC Standards.*

# Memorial Hermann delivers a new cancer care at home program

Memorial Hermann is partnering with in-home cancer care provider Reimagine Care to provide a new program that promises to help oncology patients who need access to cancer care support 24/7. A virtual and telehealth care teams help to better manage side effects of treatment and cancer symptoms of patients undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy, in the comfort of patients' homes.

Chemotherapy is considered an indispensable part of the cancer treatment regimen and global demand for first-line chemotherapy is predicted to increase by more than 50% by 2040. While chemotherapy can save lives, it can also produce side effects which must be managed, and many outpatient oncology clinics are already stretched thin.

Although providers were once able to deliver the full spectrum of care, chemo and radiation therapies require ongoing management of patients' side effects in the outpatient clinic setting. This is becoming increasingly difficult as demand for chemotherapy care needs grows significantly every year. As a result, provider practices are looking for ways to serve patients in real time who need timely support. This new program enables us to increase the support patients receive in real time, helping to improve their lives. This program is provided to patients as part of their personal care plan at no charge to the patient.

## **24/7 support**

In the next three years, up to 500 cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and radiation therapy will be enrolled in the Reimagine Care program. Participants will have 24/7 access to experienced oncology advanced practice providers (APPs) who can help manage their chemo-related symptoms and treatment side effects. These APPs, all credentialed with Memorial Hermann,



will monitor patients' symptoms and orchestrate at-home care, in conjunction with the patient's oncology care team. Patients will receive two check-in texts a week and a weekly symptom survey inquiring about their symptoms (type and severity). Based on a patient's response, the patient may receive additional support ranging from an automated text with additional information to a personal text or phone call from an APP to provide personalized guidance and support. Patients and their caregivers can also reach program clinicians at any time via phone or text.

Depending on the type and severity of a patient's symptoms, a telehealth visit, urgent care services or emergency medical services may be required. If the patient requires routine medical services, such as IV hydration, antibiotics or lab work, Reimagine Care will arrange for an in-home urgent care visit via Dispatch-Health, a leading provider of in-home urgent care. If emergency services are required, Reimagine Care will direct the patient to the appropriate emergency care facility.

Virtual care services are provided to patients free of charge. If urgent care services are required, the provider will bill the patient's insurance company. ●



## Advances in Cancer Care

# Innovative and Coordinated Care for Digestive Cancer Patients



When someone has digestive cancer, they often don't see just one doctor or one specialist. Their treatment may involve oncologists, radiologists, gastroenterologists, dietitians and other medical professionals. With numerous appointments ranging from checkups to lab work, navigating the entire process can be daunting. Memorial Hermann wants to ensure that every patient can focus on their health without the burden of managing appointments or being left wondering what steps come next. It's one reason Memorial Hermann and its affiliated physicians created the Digestive Cancer Program.

### Comprehensive and Coordinated Care

The Digestive Cancer Program includes patients being treated for cancers in the liver, pancreas, bile duct, gallbladder and small intestine, as well as gastric cancer. Given the complexity that can arise from each case, Memorial Hermann affiliated physicians saw the need to create a program that improves access, streamlines communications and ultimately enhances the patient's experience.

"The Digestive Cancer Program was developed to create a seamless and coordinated experience for our patients. From diagnosis to the start of treatment, we aim to provide comprehensive care. This includes not just medical support from our physicians but also additional resources like dietitians who specialize in cancer nutrition, offering detailed advice to help patients

throughout their journey," said **Nirav Thosani, MD**, a gastroenterologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann.

Here's how the program works: from the moment a patient enters the program, the team creates a customized plan to meet their specific needs. The plan could involve visits with specific affiliated specialists, dietitians and nurses designated to navigate the patient's care. Throughout the entire process, the whole team stays in close communication with one another, discussing the patient's progress, any changes in treatment, as well as upcoming surgeries and procedures.

**David Hall, MD**, a hepatobiliary surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann, works closely with Dr. Thosani and other members of the team. Dr. Hall emphasized that an added benefit of being in constant communication about a patient's condition is enhanced collaboration. Affiliated physicians have a group of experienced specialists working together to determine the best approach to treatment, thus providing more insight and expertise.

"For example, when a patient presents with pancreatic or liver cancer, their care requires more than just a surgeon. It involves a coordinated effort between an oncologist and an advanced gastroenterologist. These specialists work together to handle everything from diagnosis to treatment, often using non-surgical procedures. By coordinating care in a multidisciplinary manner, we can provide a comprehensive, all-in-one package for our patients," said Dr. Hall.

As a result of the streamlined, collaborative approach, not only does it help patients receive a tailored treatment plan, but it also leads to patients receiving care in a more expedited fashion.

"One unique aspect of our Digestive Cancer Program is the rapid pace at which we function. When performing a biopsy, our pathologist provides a preliminary diagnosis before the patient even wakes up. This allows us to expedite access to specialists, with patients often seeing

*continued on page 26*

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an oncologist or nurse navigator within 24 hours. This swift and seamless approach is something our patients truly appreciate,” said Dr. Thosani.

### Patient-Centric Results

At the heart of Memorial Hermann’s comprehensive Digestive Cancer Program are the patients. The program’s primary goal is to provide top-tier care through a streamlined approach, enabling patients to concentrate on their health during what is often a challenging time.

“Our patients are at the center of this program, and each specialist involved in their care strives to help them feel calm and confident in their cancer team. The journey of a cancer patient is incredibly challenging, but through this program, patients can focus on fighting cancer rather than navigating the health care system. I am fully committed to this program and feel privileged to work with an amazing team of physicians,” said

**Julie Rowe, MD**, a medical oncologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann.

**Curtis Wray, MD**, a surgical oncologist also affiliated with Memorial Hermann, shares Dr. Rowe’s commitment.

“Our focus is entirely on our patients. We recognize the challenges they face with a difficult diagnosis, and our goal is not only to provide effective treatment but also to help see that every need is met. It has been truly rewarding to witness the positive impact this program has on our patients, and we remain dedicated to enhancing their experience in any way we can,” said Dr. Wray. ●

**For more information about Memorial Hermann Cancer Centers, including how to connect with our support services or an affiliated provider, please call 833.770.7771.**

## Gamma Knife: Revolutionizing Brain Treatment Without Surgery

When it comes to battling cancer, Memorial Hermann is dedicated to providing patients with the most advanced and effective treatments available, utilizing the latest technology and tools. One such device is the Gamma Knife, a specialized form of radiosurgery. Despite its name, it doesn’t involve any actual cutting or traditional

surgery. Instead, it delivers precise radiation to target specific areas, minimizing damage to surrounding healthy tissue.

“It’s a great option because, in many cases, we don’t need to perform surgery to remove tumors; we can radiate them and disintegrate them,” said **Yoshua Esquenazi, MD**, a neurosurgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann and co-Director of the Gamma Knife Radiosurgery Program.

The Gamma Knife is such a dynamic tool that **Mark Amsbaugh, MD**, the medical director of radiation oncology at Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center, estimates about 500 Gamma Knife procedures are performed a year at Memorial Hermann-TMC.



“It is an exceptional device that requires advanced expertise to operate. We are fortunate to have a highly experienced team at Memorial Hermann with the deep knowledge and proficiency necessary to provide outstanding care,” said Dr. Amsbaugh.

Radiation oncologists, like Dr. Amsbaugh, and neurosurgeons, like Dr. Esquenazi, work collaboratively to design precise treatments for each patient. Prior to the procedure, a radiologist uses advanced imaging techniques, such as MRI or CT scans to map the exact location and size of the tumor or lesion. This detailed imaging is critical for planning the treatment, as it allows the team to create a three-dimensional coordinate system that guides the Gamma Knife’s radiation treatment.

“We establish a coordinate system, akin to having an intracranial, very high-resolution GPS. This allows us to target the affected areas while excluding unaffected brain tissue, minimizing side effects and maximizing outcomes,” said **Angel Blanco, MD**, a radiation oncologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann and co-director of the Gamma Knife program.

During Gamma Knife treatment, it is crucial that the patient’s head remains completely still. To achieve this, physicians sometimes use a stereotactic frame, a device that securely fits around the patient’s head to deliver accurate treatment. Alternatively, a thermoplastic mask may be used to immobilize the patient’s head. Both the frame and the mask serve the same purpose; they allow doctors to accurately target the exact location needing radiation treatment while avoiding healthy brain tissue.

“There are two key components that make the treatment special: the stereotactic component, meaning the exact position with a very high level of tolerance, much higher than traditional radiotherapy and the radiosurgery component, which involves a high dose of radiation with very precise guidance and conformal delivery. This is a one-time treatment. For lesions that may not be safe to treat in one day, the thermoplastic mask allows the treatment to be spread across a couple of days. However, typically, instead of daily treatment over weeks, the patient can come for one day and complete their treatment,” said Dr. Amsbaugh.

Patients typically need one Gamma Knife treatment because it delivers a highly concentrated dose of radiation with exceptional precision, effectively targeting and

treating the tumor or lesion in a single session. Following the procedure, the medical team closely monitors the patient’s progress.

“We have follow-up clinics where patients who have undergone this procedure are seen regularly to assess their response. It’s the expertise and comprehensive care at our center that truly makes a difference,” said Dr. Amsbaugh.

### **Broad Range of Treatable Conditions**

The Gamma Knife isn’t just used to treat tumors. Its exceptional precision makes it a versatile tool for treating a wide range of conditions. Dr. Amsbaugh says patients with certain pain syndromes and vascular lesions can also be treated with the Gamma Knife.

“Benign tumors and vascular lesions that aren’t even tumors, such as vascular malformations, are treated as well. Even some pain syndromes, like trigeminal neuralgia that don’t have a tumor or vascular lesion, can be treated with Gamma Knife. So, the number of conditions that can be treated is quite broad,” said Dr. Amsbaugh.

### **Strength of the Program**

While the Gamma Knife is a highly effective tool, it’s the team that truly makes a difference. The strength of the Memorial Hermann program lies in the team’s passion, collaboration and experience.

“The Memorial Hermann affiliated physicians in both neurosurgery and radiation oncology bring a wealth of experience and expertise to these procedures, along with the dedicated medical physicists whose sole responsibility is running the machine. This collaboration aids precision, enhances the quality of treatment and enhances comprehensive follow-up care. It’s all about making the process convenient for patients from the very beginning to the end,” said Dr. Amsbaugh. ●

**To learn more about the Gamma Knife visit:**  
[memorialhermann.org/services/treatments/gamma-knife](https://memorialhermann.org/services/treatments/gamma-knife)





## Discover What Your DNA Can Reveal About Your Health with genoME®

Understanding your health is the first step towards protecting it. This principle is at the heart of the genoME® community health research program by Memorial Hermann. Combining science with compassionate care, Memorial Hermann utilizes genetic screening to identify potential health issues that could affect you or your children. genoME® aims to uncover crucial information about your DNA that can help predict how your body might respond to diseases and medications or indicate your risk for certain cancers or heart disease. By harnessing this knowledge, the goal is to prevent or combat diseases, helping you live a healthier life.

### **Changing the Future**

genoME® aims to investigate the connection between DNA and health. By analyzing the DNA of participants, the program seeks to identify patterns associated with disease risks both now and in the future. This research has the potential to enable early disease detection and improve health outcomes for you and future generations. By participating in genoME®, you contribute to building a healthier community.

### **Who's Involved?**

genoME® is a community health research program led by Memorial Hermann Health System, one of Texas' largest nonprofit health systems. With more than 260

care delivery sites throughout Greater Houston, including 17 hospitals, Memorial Hermann is dedicated to fostering healthier communities today and for future generations. In collaboration with Helix, a leading population genomics company, Memorial Hermann provides valuable genetic information for proactive health care planning. genoME® aims to enroll 100,000 individuals over the age of 18 in this groundbreaking community health research program.

### **The Power of Knowledge**

When it comes to your health, knowledge is power. Understanding your genetic predispositions allows for earlier detection of disease risks, leading to better treatment outcomes and healthier lives.

Memorial Hermann is honored to be a part of the genoME® program because it aligns with our commitment to advancing health care and improving the well-being of our community. By leveraging cutting-edge genetic research in collaboration with Helix, we have the unique opportunity to identify potential health risks early, allowing for proactive and personalized care. This initiative not only enhances the health of our current patients but also contributes to the future health of generations to come, reinforcing our dedication to fostering a healthier community for all. ●

# Empowering Women Post-Mastectomy Through Innovative Surgical Techniques



Receiving a breast cancer diagnosis can be an overwhelming and life-altering experience for women. The often unexpected news is not only difficult to process but it also requires women to consider the impact of treatments on their bodies.

"It can be a lot. The period following a breast cancer diagnosis is filled with difficult decisions about treatment options and trying to balance the need to fight the disease with maintaining a sense of normalcy in daily life," said **Michelle Shen, MD**, a breast surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital.

Some women may learn that they need a mastectomy; a surgical procedure where tissue from one or both breasts is removed. This may involve removing the entire breast (a total or simple mastectomy) or just a portion of the breast tissue, depending on the extent of the cancer. The goal of the surgery is to eliminate cancerous tissue and reduce the risk of cancer spreading or recurring.

"Women who undergo a mastectomy often describe the experience as emotionally complex and deeply personal," said Dr. Shen.

Fortunately, for women undergoing a mastectomy, Memorial Hermann Sugar Land offers an advanced and highly effective reconstructive procedure known as the Deep Inferior Epigastric Perforator (DIEP) flap. This

procedure involves using a patient's own tissue, typically from the lower abdomen, to reconstruct the breast, which allows for a more natural look and feel. The DIEP flap procedure not only spares the abdominal muscles, minimizing the risk of complications and preserving core strength, but it also offers permanent results without the need for future implant replacements.

Breast surgeons, like Dr. Shen, partner with plastic surgeons to perform the procedure.

"We strive to see that reconstruction can be done immediately after the mastectomy. If a patient decides to undergo a mastectomy, we discuss their reconstruction options, and if they choose the DIEP flap, we work closely with the plastic surgeon to perform both the mastectomy and reconstruction in a single surgery," said Dr. Shen.

Additionally, using the patient's own tissue reduces complications and enhances the overall success of the surgery.

"There's less chance of rejection because it's your own tissue. It feels more comfortable and natural. There's also less risk of infection compared to an implant. Plus, with implants, you have to exchange them every 10 to 15 years, whereas using your own tissue doesn't require that," said Dr. Shen. ●

*You can learn more about breast cancer surgery by visiting [memorialhermann.org/services/treatments/breast-cancer-surgery](https://www.memorialhermann.org/services/treatments/breast-cancer-surgery)*



*"The period following a breast cancer diagnosis is filled with difficult decisions about treatment options and trying to balance the need to fight the disease with maintaining a sense of normalcy in daily life."*

*- Michelle Shen, MD*



## Community Outreach

# Ensuring Health Equity Through Comprehensive Community Care at Memorial Hermann

At Memorial Hermann, one of our core missions is to help everyone have access to quality health care. We understand that access can be challenging due to financial constraints, insurance issues, transportation and language difficulties. Our commitment is to alleviate these obstacles and make health care services more accessible for all.

In alignment with this mission, one of the Memorial Hermann oncology health equity team's key initiatives is to encourage cancer screening participation across all communities. This initiative aims to identify and overcome barriers to screenings while improving overall access.

"We're not just about treating cancer; we're also deeply committed to preventing it. Cancer screenings are a vital tool in saving lives. Early detection can significantly improve outcomes," said **Shelita Anderson, RN**, system oncology patient care director at Memorial Hermann Health System.

Shelita Anderson is actively involved in the health equity team's cancer screening program; it's something she's passionate about, especially knowing how health inequities can impact individuals in the community.

### Bridging Health Disparities

According to the American Cancer Society, Black women are 41% more likely to die from breast cancer than white women, despite having a lower incidence of diagnosis. To address this disparity, Anderson and the health equity team are collaborating with local communities and churches to bring cancer screenings to them. One of the first church partnerships involved a congregation in north Houston.





The health equity team engaged with women in the congregation, emphasizing the importance of mammograms and encouraging them to get screened. The team facilitated the process by setting up appointments on the spot and ensuring any concerns, such as cost and transportation, were addressed.

“We know that when women get mammograms, they detect problems earlier and live longer lives. Mammography reduces the risk of dying from breast cancer by 20% to 40%,” said Anderson. “By ensuring that more women, especially those in underserved communities, have access to regular screenings, we are not just saving lives, we are also enhancing the quality of life for countless individuals and their families.”

The breast cancer screening event was such a success that it prompted the pastor to suggest extending screening assistance to the men in the congregation as well. Memorial Hermann-affiliated urologists teamed up with the health equity team and assisted with prostate specific antigen (PSA) screenings, which is a blood test that detects prostate cancer. The screening was done right at the church, making it convenient for the members.

“Last year, we screened 11 African American men, and this year we plan to double or triple that number,” Anderson stated. “The screenings involve pre-arranged blood tests and consultations with physicians. By providing these services within the church, we are making it easier for men to take proactive steps in managing their health. Prostate cancer, if detected early, can be treated more effectively, and our goal is to increase early detection rates through these community-focused initiatives.”

Beyond church partnerships, Memorial Hermann engages with educational institutions such as Texas Southern University (TSU). The collaboration aims to increase awareness and access to critical health screenings among students and staff.

“Our team will advocate for breast cancer screening in October and prostate cancer screening in September at TSU,” said Anderson. “We believe that bringing these services directly to the places where people live, work and study is crucial in promoting regular health check-ups and preventive care. By embedding ourselves within these communities, we can educate and encourage individuals to prioritize their health.”

Anderson is also dedicated to raising awareness about colorectal screenings as well. The health equity team plans to collaborate with several organizations on various outreach events to educate the community and help people get screened. If cancer is detected during any screening, the health equity team will be there to assist the patient through any next steps.

### Health Literacy

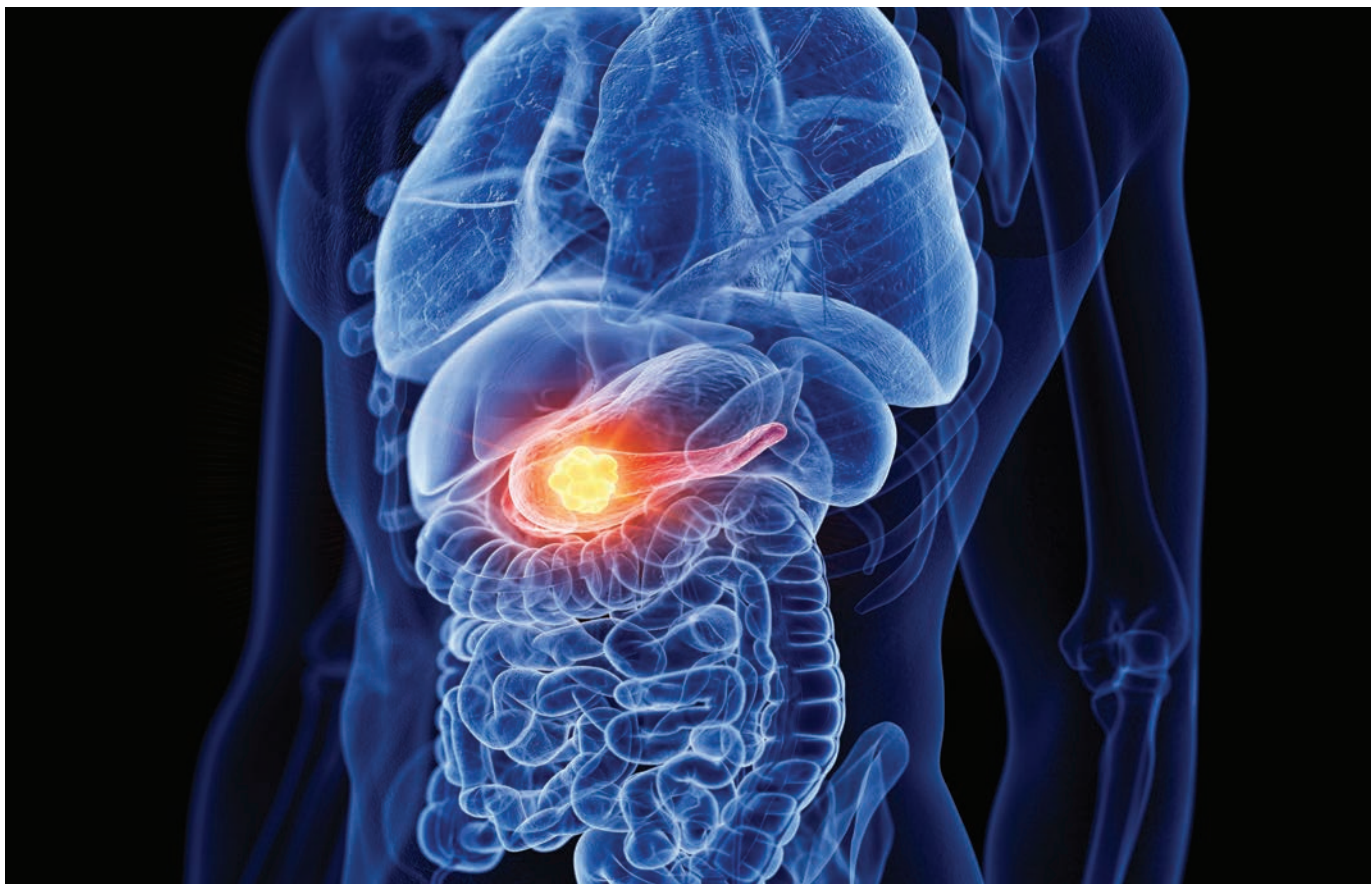
In addition to cancer screenings, the health equity efforts at Memorial Hermann also emphasize education. By prioritizing health literacy, Memorial Hermann aims to bridge the gap in health care outcomes, providing communities with the knowledge and resources necessary for effective cancer prevention.

“Health literacy involves understanding what health professionals are communicating to you. When we understand more about the care and treatment we’re receiving, we can be active participants in our health,” Anderson explained.

Achieving health equity and improving access to care is a central commitment for Anderson and the team. The health equity team is eager to continue expanding cancer screening initiatives to ensure they reach all parts of the community. By engaging with diverse community groups and addressing specific barriers to care, Anderson and her team aim to make health care accessible to everyone. ●

*“By ensuring that more women, especially those in underserved communities, have access to regular screenings, we are not just saving lives, we are also enhancing the quality of life for countless individuals and their families.”*

*- Shelita Anderson, RN*



## Research

# Memorial Hermann Leads Groundbreaking Advances in Pancreatic Cancer Treatment

Over the past several decades, there have been significant advancements in many cancer treatments, leading to increased life expectancy for diagnosed patients. However, one area that has not seen the same progress is pancreatic cancer.

“Virtually every other cancer has seen improvements in survival rates. Fewer people are dying from lung, breast and colon cancers. Unfortunately, for pancreatic cancer, we haven’t experienced the same level of improvement,” said **Curtis Wray, MD**, a surgical oncologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann.

Pancreatic cancer remains one of the deadliest cancers, with a five-year survival rate of less than 13%.

“Pancreatic cancer is typically very resistant to chemotherapy and often metastasizes early in the

disease process. We also lack effective screening programs for pancreatic cancer,” explained Dr. Wray. “For the past 50 years, we’ve seen minimal progress in improving these numbers. This cancer is notoriously difficult to treat effectively.”

However new clinical trials that doctors and researchers are conducting at Memorial Hermann are showing great promise in combating pancreatic cancer tumors, leading to improvements in patients’ quality of life and life expectancy.

“We’re in an exciting time now, with several new treatments showing promise. It is wonderful to see that we’re on the verge of making a significant impact,” said Dr. Wray.

## Trials Showing Promise

### PANCARDINAL-1 Trial

Memorial Hermann is one of the few organizations in the country participating in the promising PANCARDINAL-1 trial. This trial uses endoscopic ultrasound-guided radiofrequency ablation (EUS-RFA) in combination with standard-of-care chemotherapy. EUS provides clear images to locate the target area, while RFA uses heat to destroy the targeted cells.

The combination works to shrink the tumor, reducing the chance of the cancer spreading. Not only does EUS-RFA destroy cancer cells, but it may also train patient's own immune system to kill cancer cells.

"When certain tumor cells are killed, they become exposed to the immune system, which then learns to attack and eradicate the rest of the cancer cells," said **Nirav Thosani, MD**, a gastroenterologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann.

The PANCARDINAL-1 trial primarily targets patients with operable pancreatic cancer, where the tumor can be resected.

"The patients undergo standard chemotherapy for four months. During that time, they also receive endoscopic radiofrequency ablation. And at the end of that four-month treatment, there is a four-week break. And then patients undergo surgery, recover from surgery and finish out two final months of chemotherapy," said Dr. Wray.

The results have been promising. Dr. Wray and Dr. Thosani said patients are responding well to the treatment and many are living longer.

"Most patients are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at an advanced stage, with the majority being at stage four. Typically, they are given a prognosis of only six to nine months. However, we have seen several patients exceed this expectation, with many living beyond a year and some approaching one and a half to two years, while still doing exceptionally well. This progress is incredibly exciting to witness," said Dr. Thosani. ●

## Trials on the Horizon Targeting Stage 4 Pancreatic Cancer

Also, on the horizon, Dr. Wray said Memorial Hermann affiliated physicians hope to participate in two other trials that would expand upon the PANCARDINAL-1 trial concept. The new trials would combine EUS-RFA, chemotherapy and also add immunotherapy.

"Currently, if patients with advanced pancreas cancer are treated with chemotherapy and immunotherapy, those results have been a little disappointing. The immunotherapy doesn't seem to do much. However, in these patients when we've added radiofrequency ablation to the treatment, that direct treatment to the pancreas seems to induce change and make the tumor more sensitive to immunotherapy," said Dr. Wray.

In fact, Dr. Wray and Dr. Thosani described the combination in treatment as very promising, stating it could be a game-changer for advanced pancreatic cancer patients.

"This is an exciting time. To see that we are making such progress in treating a cancer that has been difficult to treat, and the fact we're seeing these results, it's incredible," said Dr. Thosani.

Memorial Hermann is honored to be at the forefront of these revolutionary treatments. For more information about these clinic trials please email us at: [clinical.trials@memorialhermann.org](mailto:clinical.trials@memorialhermann.org). ●



## Ongoing Clinical Trials

Memorial Hermann is proud to support a variety of clinical trials dedicated to advancing cancer care and improving patient outcomes. Here's a look at several of the trials we're currently supporting.

<b>Comprehensive Outcomes for After Cancer Health (COACH)</b>  <b>Sponsor: Pack Health, A Quest Diagnostics Company</b> <b>ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT05349227</b>	<b>Contact:</b> Kaukab Jafry Kaukab.I.Jafry@uth.tmc.edu 832.325.6537
<b>A Study to Learn About the Study Medicine Called PF-07220060 in Combination With Fulvestrant in People With HR-positive, HER2-negative Advanced or Metastatic Breast Cancer Who Progressed After a Prior Line of Treatment (Protocol C4391022)</b>  <b>ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT06105632</b>	<b>Contact:</b> Ayodeji (Ayo) Adeniji Ayodeju.Adeniji@uth.tmc.edu 713.500.5570
<b>Psycho-Spiritual Support for Patients with Advanced Cancer and their Family Caregivers (Protocol 2023-0450)</b>  <b>ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT06409065</b>	<b>Contact:</b> Ayodeji (Ayo) Adeniji Ayodeju.Adeniji@uth.tmc.edu 713.500.5570
<b>A Phase 1/1b, First-in-Human, Open Label, Dose Escalation and Cohort Expansion Study of MGC026 in Participants with Advanced Solid Tumors (Protocol CP-MGC026-01)</b>  <b>ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT06242470</b>	<b>Contact:</b> Kaukab Jafry Kaukab.I.Jafry@uth.tmc.edu 832.325.6537
<b>Pilot Project-1: Impact of race and ethnicity on outcomes in patients with hormone receptor-positive breast cancer treated with CDK4/6 inhibitors</b>	<b>Contact:</b> Rodney Hunter rodney.hunter@memorialhermann.org 713.704.3961
<b>Biomarkers of Cancer Cachexia: A Prospective Translational Observational Study</b>	<b>Contact:</b> ms.oncology.research@uth.tmc.edu 713.704.3961
<b>Development of a Patient-Derived Xenograft Mouse Model of Solid Tumors</b>	<b>Contact:</b> Betty Arceneaux ms.oncology.research@uth.tmc.edu 713.704.3186
<b>Creating Functional Three-Dimensional Cell Cultures of Pathological Specimens from Uncommon Cancer Patients</b>	<b>Contact:</b> Betty Arceneaux ms.oncology.research@uth.tmc.edu 713.704.3186

These diverse trials reflect Memorial Hermann's dedication to not only developing cutting-edge cancer treatments but also addressing quality of life, personalized care, and the unique challenges faced by patients from various backgrounds. For more details on our ongoing clinical trials, please visit **ClinicalTrials.gov** and filter for active trials at Memorial Hermann.

# Transforming Liver Cancer Care: The Power of Targeted Radiation Dr. Krishnan

**Sunil Krishnan, MD**, a radiation oncologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann, has dedicated his career to treating gastrointestinal (GI) tumors, with a particular focus on liver, pancreas and colorectal cancers. His expertise, developed over years at leading institutions including the Mayo Clinic and MD Anderson, has led to significant advancements in radiation oncology. Now, he shares his knowledge and insight with the oncology team at Memorial Hermann, driving innovative approaches for liver cancer treatment.

## Overcoming Traditional Challenges in Liver Cancer Treatment

Historically, radiation therapy for liver tumors posed significant risks due to the sensitivity of the surrounding liver tissue, which could be easily damaged.

“The traditional dogma was that liver tumors were difficult to treat with radiation because the liver is particularly sensitive, and you could inadvertently cause damage,” said Dr. Krishnan.

However, research over the past 20 years has shown that if a portion of healthy liver tissue is spared, liver tumors can be effectively treated with higher doses of radiation. This approach allows for tumor shrinkage without significant harm to the surrounding liver, transforming radiation into a viable treatment option for patients with liver cancer.

Dr. Krishnan highlights the impact of this progress, particularly for patients with hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), a common form of primary liver cancer.

“HCC often arises due to obesity and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, or in some cases, alcoholic liver disease or hepatitis C and B,” he explained. “As long as the cancer is confined to the liver and hasn’t spread to other organs, many of these patients can be treated with radiation.”

## A Groundbreaking Study

Dr. Krishnan was a key contributor to a large, randomized study, soon to be published in *JAMA Oncology*, which focused on the effectiveness of a five-fraction radiation



regimen for liver tumors. A five-fraction radiation regimen involves administering five targeted doses of radiation over a short period, typically within one or two weeks. Each dose is carefully calibrated to shrink the tumor while sparing surrounding healthy tissue. By allowing normal tissue to recover between treatments, this approach minimizes side effects and maximizes the therapeutic impact on the tumor.

“Surprisingly, just five fractions of radiation significantly improved both progression-free survival and overall survival rates,” Dr. Krishnan noted.

The results are expected to set a new standard of care for liver tumors, providing a more efficient and effective treatment option. At Memorial Hermann, Dr. Krishnan and his team apply these findings to real-world patient care.

“It’s very gratifying to tag team with specialists like hepatologists, medical oncologists, interventional radiologists and others to develop effective treatment plans,” said Dr. Krishnan. “The multidisciplinary approach ensures that liver cancer patients receive comprehensive care, with radiation therapy, chemotherapy and other treatment options tailored to each individual’s needs.”

As Memorial Hermann continues to integrate these advanced protocols, Dr. Krishnan remains committed to providing advanced care for liver cancer patients. His work is helping to transform the landscape of liver cancer treatment, offering patients new, more effective options for managing their disease. ●

# Advancing Cancer Care Through Clinical Trials at Memorial Hermann

At Memorial Hermann, we are dedicated to advancing cancer treatment through clinical trials, which play a crucial role in improving patient outcomes and expanding our understanding of cancer therapies, risk detection and prevention. These trials are a core part of our mission, as they provide patients with access to the latest treatments while contributing to the development of future therapies. Memorial Hermann is actively involved in 32 clinical trials, allowing our physicians and researchers to evaluate new interventions and deliver innovative, research-based care that can significantly enhance the quality of life for our patients.

Our current clinical trials focus on various aspects of cancer care, including new treatments for breast cancer, gynecological cancers, neuro-oncology and other solid tumors, as well as studies examining the impact of socioeconomic and supportive care programs.

## New Treatments

Memorial Hermann is at the forefront of cancer research, actively involved in clinical trials that explore innovative treatments for a range of cancers. We are currently conducting studies that combine a new drug with hormone therapy to treat advanced or metastatic breast cancer. Additionally, we are evaluating how a trial drug targets locally advanced or metastatic solid tumors by inhibiting tumor growth and slowing cancer progression. These are just a few examples of our efforts to provide groundbreaking treatments that have the potential to significantly improve patients' lives.



In neuro-oncology, Memorial Hermann is participating in four clinical trials utilizing novel treatments to tackle brain cancers. With four additional trials on the way, we are advancing research to find more effective solutions for the unique challenges faced by brain cancer patients.

We are also engaged in six clinical trials focused on gynecological malignancies, investigating new treatment options for ovarian, uterine, fallopian tube and cervical cancers at different stages. By contributing to these innovative trials, Memorial Hermann is working to improve patient outcomes and expand the understanding of complex diseases within the field of gynecological oncology.

## Behavioral Health

Memorial Hermann is also participating in a behavioral research study to understand how supportive care programs impact the psychological well-being and quality of life for cancer patients and their caregivers. This research explores how emotional support can enhance the overall cancer experience for both patients and their families.

We are also involved in an important study examining how social determinants of health, like financial burden, distance to treatment, and social support, affect cancer care outcomes. This study looks at how these non-medical factors influence medication adherence, treatment success and long-term survival, helping us identify barriers to care.

Lastly, we are conducting research using tumor tissue collected during routine biopsies or surgeries to create organoids, which are miniature versions of the tumors. These models allow researchers to test anti-cancer drugs and predict how patients may respond to treatments, offering a personalized approach to cancer care.

Memorial Hermann's clinical trials are dedicated to not only treating and managing cancer, but also improving patients' quality of life by offering access to the latest, most innovative medical advancements, ensuring patients receive the best care possible. ●

***For more information about our ongoing clinical trials, please visit [memorialhermann.org](https://www.memorialhermann.org) and search for clinical trials.***



## About Memorial Hermann Cancer Care

Memorial Hermann offers the entire continuum of cancer care—education, prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship and rehabilitation. We do more than provide trusted medical care; we are helping patients navigate their entire cancer journey by caring for their physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs. Patients can take advantage of cancer services in their own neighborhood through our convenient network, which includes eight Cancer Centers, more than 20 breast care locations, 17\* hospitals and numerous specialty programs and services located throughout the Greater Houston area.

Through partnerships and affiliations with community oncology providers, patients can be confident that oncology specialists are working together to ensure the best possible outcome for their cancer treatment.

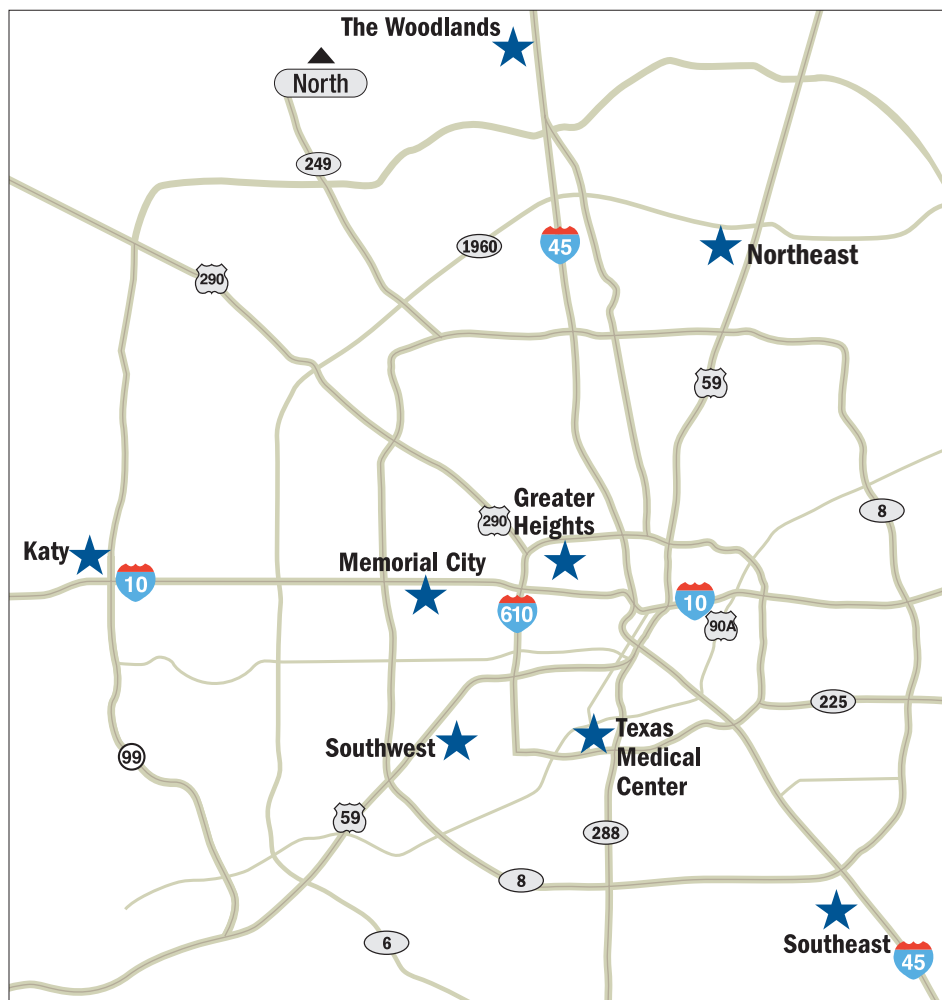
At Memorial Hermann, we provide patients with the tools and resources needed to fight cancer close to home when home is where they want to be. All Memorial Hermann Cancer Centers are accredited by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer, and the Breast Care Center at Memorial Hermann Greater Heights Hospital has been granted full, 3-year accreditation by the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers.

To refer a patient or to be connected to support services, contact a Memorial Hermann Oncology Nurse Navigator at 833.770.7771.

*\*Memorial Hermann Health System owns and operates 14 hospitals and has joint ventures with three other hospital facilities, including Memorial Hermann Surgical Hospital First Colony, Memorial Hermann Surgical Hospital Kingwood and Memorial Hermann Rehabilitation Hospital-Katy.*



## Memorial Hermann Cancer Center Locations



### Memorial City

925 Gessner Rd.  
Houston, TX 77024  
866.338.1150

### Northeast

18960 Memorial North  
Humble, TX 77338  
855.537.0016

### Greater Heights

1635 North Loop West  
Houston, TX 77008  
855.537.0019

### Katy

23900 Katy Fwy.  
Katy, TX 77494  
281.644.7000

### Southeast

11920 Astoria Blvd.  
Suite 100  
Houston, TX 77089  
855.537.0017

### Southwest

7600 Beechnut St.  
Houston, TX 77074  
713.456.4028

### Texas Medical Center

6400 Fannin St.  
Suite 2900  
Houston, TX 77030  
855.537.0013

### The Woodlands

920 Medical Plaza Dr.  
Suite 100  
Shenandoah, TX 77380  
855.537.0015