



FACT Sheet: What is Community Oncology?

Almost 55 percent of the Americans battling cancer receive treatment in the community oncology setting. A community oncology practice is a private physician owned business not part of a hospital or academic or medical teaching institution. The community oncology practice may be only a single oncologist, with one office and a support staff of physician extenders, nurses, pharmacists, or pharmacy technicians and other staff. The largest community oncology practice in the country is in Texas and has over 400 physicians on staff and over 25 satellite offices. There are community oncology practices in almost every state, in rural locations, and in the largest cities.

The Community Oncology Mission

Cancer treatment can be intense and span many years requiring regular physician visits for chemotherapy and follow-up care. Keeping patients close to their homes, families, and support networks lessens the burden of this devastating disease. Community oncology practices provide access to local, affordable cancer care. Their clear mission is to:

- Ensure access to state-of-the-art, high quality, affordable cancer care in a community based setting
- Offer value to patients and payers alike
- Deliver integrated care via the Oncology Medical Home model

Cancer Care and Beyond

The mission of patient care drives a community oncology practice. Most community oncologists care for patients with a variety of cancers. Most also manage any side effects associated with cancer treatment and often function as the patient's primary care physician, or Oncology Medical Home, while the patient is in active treatment. Once active treatment is completed, community oncologists will monitor patients in remission, often for the remainder of their lives.

Quality Care

Access to the most current treatment protocols, clinical trials, and comprehensive care are available in the community oncology setting. Research has shown that community oncology practices provide state of the art, quality care in cancer clinics usually within a few miles of the patient's home. Community oncology delivers greater, easier access when compared to other sites of care, such as hospital based outpatient departments.

Lower Cost Care

One of the hallmarks of community cancer care is the attention to drug costs. To control costs for the patient as well as the health care system, these practices develop care protocols that provide the best possible care while limiting drug costs. Patients who receive chemotherapy entirely in the hospital outpatient setting incur a significantly higher cost share than patients whose chemotherapy was delivered entirely in a physician office. A 2016 Milliman study confirmed that patients who had their chemotherapy delivered entirely in the hospital outpatient setting incurred a significantly higher cost than patients whose chemotherapy was delivered entirely in a physician office. For Medicare patients, the difference was \$13,167 (37%) higher in 2004 and \$16,208 (34%) higher in 2014; for commercially insured patients it was \$19,475 (25%) higher in 2004, and \$46,272 (42%) higher in 2014.

Easy Access to Monitored Care

As part of their efforts to provide the highest quality care and to control costs, many community oncology practices have in-house pharmacies that dispense chemotherapy drugs, including oral therapies. Practice staff can provide greater continuity of care by managing all aspects of drug therapy - from initial dispensing to completion of therapy. In-practice dispensing allows for improved patient convenience, safety, and compliance. Because community oncologists have actual eyes on the patient, they are the preferred provider to assure patient compliance, real time side-effect management, and medication management commensurate with patient laboratory values, performance status and other pertinent factors.

Personal Local Care

Cancer care requires frequent physician visits, a close attention to detail and the ability to recognize changes in patient status. Care close to home is important to make these frequent visits as easy as possible and to limit disruption of a patient's day-to-day life – including work and travel time. As patients meet with their care team a close, personal relationship develops that adds to patient care and comfort. With their local presence and frequent contact, community oncology practices make that possible.

Community Oncologists and the Cancer Care Team

Cancer care is complex. Community oncology practices provide an entire team to coordinate care, monitor patient status, and provide the best possible outcomes. The community oncology team – physicians, nurses, pharmacists, financial counselors and patient navigators – work with every patient from diagnosis through active treatment and into remission. They have made our cancer care delivery system the best in the world.