



Cancer Research Center Hotline

Availability of Clinical Trials for Hawaii Cancer Patients

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There are many hundreds of cancer centers throughout the country but only about 50 of those involved in patient care have achieved National Cancer Institute designation based on research excellence. The Cancer Research Center of Hawaii is one of them. Furthermore, the Center is unique in that it does not operate its own treatment facility. In order to minimize this deficiency on new treatment opportunities for Hawaii cancer patients, the Center has worked hard over many years to provide clinical trials through Hawaii's private community hospitals, private practitioners, and the Tripler Army Medical Center.

The importance of having patients and their physicians participate in clinical trials cannot be over emphasized. All advances that have been made in cancer care have been identified through participation of patients in clinical trials. Clinical trials provide the scientific evidence for treatment recommendations and guidelines.

A goal should be to enroll the majority of patients in clinical trials. Since clinical trials results are the basis for treatment guidelines, patients on clinical trials should be representative of those encountered in everyday clinical practice. When only a minority of cancer patients participate in clinical trials, there is reduced confidence that treatment guidelines are appropriate for patients commonly encountered. This is especially pertinent to Hawaii's multiethnic population whose treatment response may be quite different to mainly Caucasian patients attending tertiary referral centers on the mainland, the source of most evidence for current treatment recommendations.

The access of Hawaii's cancer patients to national, peer-reviewed clinical trials is an essential component of quality cancer care in our state. Clinical trials provide potentially better treatments while guaranteeing the best evidence-based care in a closely monitored setting. Today, 40-50% of cancer patients cannot be cured by current treatments. The National Institute of Health in a report to the Senate Appropriation Committee stated: "For patients with life-threatening disease for which standard therapy is inadequate or lacking altogether, participation in well-designed, closely monitored clinical trials represents best medical care for the patient. The National Cancer Institute believes that clinical trials are standard therapy for cancer patients to whom a curative therapy cannot be offered.

Helping healthcare providers maintain proficiency is a further benefit of clinical trials participation. Physicians and other providers who treat patients on clinical trials benefit from the continuing education they derive in the process. Clinical trials protocols and their introduction and promotion give providers information on up-to-date care and indicate the direction of future scientific advances.


Presently, the Center has more than 100 clinical trials from National Cancer Institute-supported clinical research groups in-

cluding many of the most promising new treatments available at the country's major cancer centers. This achievement has been made possible through receiving since 1994, a highly competitive Minority-Based, Community Clinical Oncology Program grant from the National Cancer Institute. Only eight of these grants are awarded throughout the U.S. Now, most Hawaii cancer patients do not have to endure the additional burden of travel to the mainland for optimal care. Also, we provide clinical trials that test ways to prevent the most common cancers, such as of the breast and prostate, for individuals who are at most risk for these diseases. Along with clinical trials, we conduct seminars and lectures for the continuing education of physicians and other health professionals in all aspects of cancer care and prevention. We are especially proud that through the tireless efforts of Center staff and community professionals, we have in recent years achieved the participation of almost all Hawaii clinical oncologists in our clinical trials and education activities.

National Cancer Institute-sponsored clinical trials are organized in several national/international cooperative groups. Hawaii participates in the following: Southwest Oncology Group (SWOG), Children's Oncology Group (previously named Pediatric Oncology Group), Gynecologic Oncology Group (GOG), National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP) and Radiation Therapy Oncology Group (RTOG). Community oncologists provide leadership for specific cooperative groups: Jeffrey Berenberg, M.D. for SWOG, Robert Wilkinson, M.D. for Children's Oncology Group, Keith Terada, M.D. for GOG, Robert Oishi, M.D. for NSABP and Paul DeMare, M.D. for RTOG. Carolyn Gotay, Ph.D., deputy director of the Clinical Trials Unit, provides leadership for all psychosocial and behavioral studies.

Contact the Clinical Trials Unit at 586-2979 for any questions concerning clinical trials for your patients. Clinical research associates are available to help evaluate the suitability of your patient for an active clinical trial, to assist with counseling involved in putting a patient on study, and to facilitate study monitoring and data collection. Dorothy Coleman, R.N., M.S. is manager of the Clinical Trials Unit. Brian Issell M.D., FACP is director of the Unit.

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