

# SCRIPT – PRINT - COVID-19 and Cancer Care

## Treatment Carries on with Proper Adjustments

The COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for many people, but for those dealing with cancer, it can be downright overwhelming.

Every day, people are given a cancer diagnosis, which means grappling not only with the devastating news, but dealing with the idea of making appointments with your medical team, scheduling tests and working with your physician to determine the best time to start potential treatments, not to mention the anxiety that comes with taking precautions during the pandemic. Needless to say, it's a lot to deal with all at once.

“So in terms of delaying cancer care during the COVID-19 pandemic, it really depends on the type of cancer that you have, the stage of the cancer if you're having any symptoms,” said Dr. Iftekhar Ahmad, medical director of Oncology Services for the Patricia D. Pepe Center for Cancer Care at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center.

For the most part, cancer is something that won't wait for anything, even a pandemic. So a lot of times it is something that we need to treat, but at the same time there are different strategies that we can look at to make sure it's the safest way possible. And again, the Center for Cancer Care is taking a lot of precautions to make sure that we can still provide excellent cancer care in the safest manner possible.”

While everyone is encouraged to take extra precautions these days, it's especially important for those fighting cancer, many of whom have compromised immune systems.

“So if you currently have cancer the best to protect yourself is to follow a lot of the recommendations that we're seeing meaning that you want to maintain social distance, you don't want to be in crowded places, you want to wear a mask, you want to do proper hand hygiene, and you want to be careful in terms of not taking any symptoms lightly,” said Dr. Iftekhar Ahmad, medical director of Oncology Services for the Patricia D. Pepe Center for Cancer Care at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center.

During the pandemic, the oncology services at OSF HealthCare have made significant changes for the way patients access the system as they prepare to arrive at the hospital for their appointments, testing and treatments.

“So the Cancer Center is doing a lot of different actions to ensure the safety of the patients and the staff, during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Dr. Iftekhar Ahmad, medical director of Oncology Services for the Patricia D. Pepe Center for Cancer Care at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. “We are calling all patients the day before, to access them, to see if they are having any symptoms of COVID-19. When they actually come in for their visit the next day, they are screened, in person right at the door and a temperature check is done at that time. We are limiting the number of visitors who are allowed to come in to the point that only new patients are allowed to have one visitor, mainly to have another set of eyes and ears to hear about their diagnosis and different treatments, we feel that's kind of necessary.”

But it's not just patients. OSF Mission Partners (employees) are also required to do their part to protect the patients and the people who work around them. And that includes making sure the equipment and facilities receive extra attention when it comes to cleaning.

"We are also making sure that Mission Partners themselves are being closely monitored to ensure the safety of the patients," said Dr. Iftekhar Ahmad, medical director of Oncology Services for the Patricia D. Pepe Center for Cancer Care at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. "All Mission Partners are required to do a temperature check on arrival, as well as screened for symptoms. Every Mission Partner as well as patients are required to wear masks. Hand hygiene is being emphasized even more than before. We are making sure we are keeping everything as clean as possible including wheelchairs that are being cleaned being every patient interaction. Every room is being cleaned from top to bottom between patients and we are also maintaining social distance in the clinic and in the waiting rooms of the best of our abilities."

Patients like Brandie Messer appreciate doctors, nurses and staff going the extra mile to ensure the safety of patients like her.

"Even with the COVID-19 pandemic I have never felt endangered and I was not afraid to come in," said patient Brandie Messer. "They gave us masks for the patients and they told us they'd like us to wear them when we came in and once we get in our cubicle we can take them off. But the nurses and the doctors wear masks when I'm around them and they use precautions when they access my port so that I don't get any infections."