

Taking Cancer Treatments to Heart

When someone is diagnosed with cancer, the focus turns to crossing the finish line to survivorship. People are now living longer than ever after a cancer diagnosis, thanks to often aggressive treatments. But what happens when the treatment that eradicates cancer has the potential to damage other vital organs?

The OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute is taking that issue to heart – partnering with Illinois Cancer Care for a unique program that gets to the heart of the problem. The Cardio-Oncology program is a way for cancer patients to continue treatment, under the watch of an interdisciplinary team of cardiologists, oncologists and radiologists.

Dr. Barry Clemson is a Cardiologist with OSF Cardiovascular Institute. He helped get Cardio-Oncology off the ground in 2016.

“The real premise here is we want to try to make sure that patients that are being treated for cancer, that are going to get potentially cardio-toxic drugs, so drugs that can affect the heart, don’t have to have therapy interrupted. They can stay on therapy to complete their full course of treatment,” he said.

The Cardio-Oncology program also focuses on patients with a history of heart issues or patients who are at risk of developing issues after treatment has ended.

Illinois Cancer Care Hematologist and Oncologist Dr. Madhuri Bajaj says each patient gets a specially tailored treatment plan, with the benefit of specialized care well into the future.

“For a patient it means that during the course of their cancer treatment, whether it’s at the beginning, during the treatment, or even afterwards as a survivor of cancer, we are really focusing on trying to keep their overall health as optimum as possible,” said Dr. Bajaj.

Dr. Clemson says over the past two years the collaboration between OSF Cardiovascular Institute and Illinois Cancer Center has been invaluable to the program’s growth. When it rolled out, Peoria was one of the only regions in the state Cardio-Oncology was available. Since then, an abundance of cardiovascular research has been collected on cancer patients, treatments and survivorship.

“You see these programs now developing all around the country. It started in a few places, but it’s really grown,” said Dr. Clemson. He continued, “There has been extensive research on cancer survivors, particularly pediatrics, because then they survive and live a long time. So what happens to them downstream from their cancer treatment? We’ve learned a lot from that and now we know how to monitor those patients better.”

And for the patient, Dr. Bajaj says the teamwork between providers has given patients of the cardio-oncology program peace of mind, allowing them to focus less on the what-if’s and more on getting better.

“Patients have been very satisfied with just the concept of knowing that there’s a cardiologist and an oncologist who are working closely to make sure that their heart is healthy throughout the treatment, and also for years to come afterwards.”

To learn more about Cardio-Oncology and OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute, click [here](#) or speak to your oncologist or cardiologist to see if you could benefit from the Cardio-Oncology program.