

Local hospitals examine cancer prevention and treatment advances

by Gabby Christensen

Cancer prevention and treatment advances are hot topics in the medical field and local professionals have been working diligently to bring to light new options.

Julie Murray, vice president at Methodist Hospital, said Methodist Health System has launched an initiative with the intent to eliminate any barriers to breast health with its new Methodist Mobile 3D Mammography coach.

“The coach will offer 3D digital mammography screening technology on location to the uninsured and underinsured as well as the business community at large,” Murray said. “Digital mammography replaces X-ray film with detectors that capture images in computer code, producing brighter, crisper images of the breast on a computer screen. Digital mammography provides several advantages to film mammography including better resolution, easier to read scans and increased accuracy.”

According to Murray, the coach will provide screenings for at least 16 patients a day.

Murray said Methodist has also implemented new technologies, such as the digital PET scan technology, which plays an important role in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

Additionally, she said a new linear accelerator at Methodist Estabrook Cancer Center will offer more targeted radiation therapies for patients.

In the gynecologic oncology arena, Murray said specialists are utilizing sentinel lymph node mapping to aid in the detection and staging of gynecological cancer.

When it comes to cancer prevention, Kelly Horn, physician liaison at Nebraska Cancer Specialists, said it’s important that people see a primary care physician annually.

Depending on a person’s age, Horn said it may be time to begin preventative screenings such as mammograms, colonoscopies or PSA tests.

In the spring of every year, Nebraska Cancer Specialists sponsors a free skin

screening to the community.

“We are committed to delivering compassionate, personalized, and cutting edge care in a convenient outpatient community oncology setting,” Horn said. “We are proud to be pioneering the state’s first and largest



Murray



Horn



Sarcone

dedicated theranostics center.”

Horn explained that theranostics is a new field of cancer care, relatively new to the United States, which describes using the combination of one radioactive drug to diagnose and a second to deliver a specific targeted therapy based upon the initial targeted test.

According to Horn, Nebraska Cancer Specialists’ research program conducts phase I-IV trials and has enrolled over 200 patients on clinical trials in the past few years.

Emily Sarcone, outreach coordinator, oncology at CHI Health Creighton University Medical Center – Bergan Mercy, said it’s estimated that approximately half of all cancer deaths are preventable with the knowledge and resource that are available.

“Currently, there are five main areas to focus on when talking about cancer prevention: tobacco use, dietary factors/obesity, infections, alcohol use and environmental

pollutants,” Sarcone said.

She said obesity and poor nutrition contribute to nearly 20 percent of all cancers.

According to Sarcone, one of the most recent changes in prevention was the expansion of the HPV vaccine being approved for men and women ages 27 to 45.

“This vaccine is highly effective in preventing nearly all strains that are covered in this vaccine when administered properly,” Sarcone said.

Dr. Peter Silberstein, chief of oncology at Creighton University, said immunotherapies for cancer are one of the biggest advancements seen recently.

According to Silberstein, this option has been FDA approved and is covered by insurance for numerous cancers including head, neck, lung, stomach, liver, kidney, bladder and cervical.

“This isn’t chemotherapy,” Silberstein said. “This is immune cells killing the cancer. There are far less side effects than chemotherapy and in many trials, this has been more effective than chemotherapy.”

Silberstein said patients should be aware that immunotherapy does increase inflammatory response, though.

In some newer trials, Silberstein said immunotherapies have been combined with chemotherapy and radiation.

Although immunotherapy is expensive, Silberstein said the results have been excellent.

“I’ve not only seen literature that says immunotherapy is working, I’ve actually witnessed it with our own patients,” Silberstein said. “There’s minimal side effects and treatment is less toxic than chemotherapy. I have seen many patients have increased longevity because of immunotherapy.”