

HEALTH

Currents



**Is the COVID
vaccine safe for
cancer patients?**

**Don't wait for
a lung cancer
screening**

**Mental health is
key in cancer care**

Spot skin cancer early.

✓ Check yourself ✓ Protect yourself

Wednesday, May 12

6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Online seminar

One out of every five people will develop skin cancer at some point in their life. If found early, when it's small and hasn't spread, skin cancer can often be treated with success.



Join dermatologist, **Riddhi Shah, DO**, as she discusses different types of skin cancer, how to identify and treat the disease, and the importance of preventative measures and regular skin exams.



Register for this free webinar.
Call **269.927.5361** or visit
stonegatedermatology.com/skincancer

Stonegate
DERMATOLOGY
OF LAKELAND

Inside this special issue:



At Spectrum Health Lakeland, we're proud to offer comprehensive cancer care, including the latest technology, access to new therapies and research trials, highly trained medical professionals, and skilled partner physicians. Programs and services focus on cancer prevention, detection, treatment, education, and support to help provide the best quality of life possible for our patients. Now, more than ever, screenings and close monitoring for unusual changes can mean earlier detection, less invasive treatment, and increased survival. Getting people back to the life they love, cancer free, drives us to keep innovating and providing exceptional care. Read on to learn more about what we offer.

Edmund Paloyan, MD
Oncology medical director
Spectrum Health Lakeland



For lung cancer, early screenings save lives

When it comes to lung cancer, it's important to get a diagnosis earlier rather than later. Early lung cancer detection increases your chances of survival and makes treatment easier.

For eligible patients, doctors use a low-dose CT scan to identify lung cancer before any symptoms start. Using special X-ray technology, images of the body are captured at different angles to show the lungs. This is done in less than 20 seconds with no needles, medications, or even a change of clothes. The result is a highly accurate image created with minimal exposure to radiation.

Because low-dose CT scans can find lung cancer at such early stages, in most cases, the cancer can be removed with surgery alone.

"Performing a low-dose CT scan gives us a 20% survival advantage, which is huge for any screening," said Edmond Paloyan, MD, director of oncology services, Spectrum Health Lakeland. "Not too many times do we have the opportunity to prevent such a devastating disease like cancer."

Spectrum Health Lakeland is a designated Lung Cancer Alliance Screening Center of Excellence and a national leader in detecting lung cancer in its earliest stages.

To find out more about the lung cancer screening program, visit spectrumhealthlakeland.org/lung or call the high risk cancer program at **269.932.9337**

Reducing cancer care costs for patients

Chemotherapy is a lifesaving cancer treatment. But like many infusions, the medications used in chemotherapy are often costly—a single treatment can sometimes cost thousands of dollars.

The biosimilars program at Spectrum Health Lakeland is helping to reduce out-of-pocket costs for cancer treatment and ease the financial burden for cancer patients and their families. Since our program began in 2019, patients have seen an estimated \$800,000 in cost savings when biosimilars are used for cancer treatment.

Same treatment, smaller cost

Biosimilars have a similar molecular structure to an original "reference" drug. They are an infusion drug like the one patients would normally receive. They are similar on a molecular level with no clinical differences in safety, purity, and potency. And biosimilars are significantly lower in cost than reference drugs.

Available now at Lakeland

Biosimilars were first used in Europe in the early 2000s. After seeing positive outcomes for cancer patients abroad, the FDA started a rigorous testing and approval program for biosimilars in the United States.

Still considered an innovative treatment, biosimilars are not widely available in the U.S. In fact, Spectrum Health Lakeland is one of the few health systems in the country working to approve more biosimilars for cancer care.

We believe biosimilars are helping to reduce the financial and emotional stress of cancer treatment. If you think biosimilars could be right for you, ask your provider for more details.

Who's eligible for early lung cancer screening?

If you're considered high risk for lung cancer, your insurance likely covers low-dose CT scans. Talk to your primary care provider, who can order the screening if you:

- Are age 50 to 80 years old
- Have smoked a pack a day for 20 years
- And are a current smoker or quit within the past 15 years

If you meet the eligibility criteria above, you should consider getting a low-dose CT scan every year.

A no brainer



Pat Howland is no stranger to mammograms. For three years leading up to her diagnosis she's had one every six months as a precautionary measure for a spot in her breast that had been previously detected. However, it was between the regularly scheduled mammograms when she noticed a new lump in her left breast. While a diagnostic mammogram revealed the initial lump was not cancerous, a second lump was detected which turned out to be invasive ductal carcinoma—a common form of breast cancer which occurs in the lining of the milk ducts.

After receiving the news, the Chicago resident didn't waste any time scheduling an appointment with a surgeon near her hometown to learn more about available treatment options.

"My surgeon discussed what I assumed was standard treatment for breast cancer—surgery and four to six weeks of radiation," said Pat. "It wasn't until I was talking to my neighbor and she recommended a treatment available at Spectrum Health Lakeland that I realized I had other choices."

Interested in learning more, Pat reached out to oncology nurse navigator, **Shelley Wilkinson, RN, CBCN**, at the Marie Yeager Cancer Center in St. Joseph.

"Shelley was my angel," said Pat. "The only thing required of me from the time I met Shelley to the end of my treatment, was to show up when and where she told me.

She followed my care and provided me with things I didn't even know I needed. I still can't believe how wonderful I was treated."

During her initial meeting with radiation oncologist, **Benjamin Gielda, MD**, Pat learned about intraoperative radiation therapy (IORT)—a treatment for breast cancer that delivers radiation at the time of surgery, following tumor removal. For many women this eliminates the need for four to six weeks of follow up radiation after surgery.

"No one in Chicago even mentioned IORT to me," said Pat. "After explaining how the procedure worked, Dr. Gielda suggested I go home and think about it. I told him I didn't need to—as far as I was concerned it was a no brainer for me."

On the day of surgery, Pat returned to Spectrum Health Lakeland—an hour and 45-minute drive she says was worth every mile. While in the operating room, general surgeon, **Dennis Rasbach, MD**, performed lumpectomy surgery to remove the cancerous cells in Pat's breast. During the procedure he also discovered a second cancerous lump which was previously undetected and removed it at the same time. Once the tumors were removed, Dr. Rasbach, together with Dr. Gielda, delivered a dose of radiation directly to the tumor bed.

"When compared to having my rotator cuff repaired, breast cancer was a walk in the park," said Pat.

"I felt very little discomfort and was strangely at peace throughout the entire experience."

Since her surgery, Pat continues to follow up regularly with an oncologist in Chicago. Although Pat said she hopes she'll never have to undergo breast cancer again, she wouldn't hesitate to return to Spectrum Health Lakeland for care.

"Everyone I came into contact with at Lakeland treated me with the utmost care and concern," she said.

"When faced with this kind of diagnosis, it is wonderful to know there is a place you can go for treatment and know with certainty they are not going to drop the ball."

For more information about IORT and to read stories from other women on why they chose this therapy, visit spectrumhealthlakeland.org/IORT



83 people have benefited from IORT at Spectrum Health Lakeland.

Patients at Spectrum Health Lakeland have been spared **200+ weeks** of radiation therapy and over **\$2 million** in costs have been saved.

A better path for those at risk for breast cancer

The high risk cancer program at Spectrum Health Lakeland is taking some of the uncertainty out of the breast cancer journey. The program provides monitoring for those at high risk for breast cancer with the goal of discovering and diagnosing it early. If cancer is found, expedited services will get patients through treatment as soon as possible.

Patients in the program have access to several screenings to help reduce the risk of breast cancer and find it quickly if it does occur. These include breast exams and imaging, genetic counseling, and guidance on nutrition and lifestyle choices.

Are you eligible for the high risk cancer program?

Most of us know that family history is one factor that may put you at risk for breast cancer, but any of the following can also make you a candidate for our high risk cancer program:

- You are over 20 years old with a family history of breast cancer diagnosed at or before 50 years of age.
- You have multiple close relatives with a history of breast cancer.
- There is a known gene mutation in your family with associated increased breast cancer risk.
- You have a history of breast biopsy proven atypical hyperplasia or lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS).
- You have had chest wall radiation.
- You have a family history of male breast cancer.
- You are of Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry.

We encourage you to connect with our high risk cancer program team if any of these breast cancer risk factors apply to you. Your doctor can make a referral, or you can call us directly at **269.932.9337**



Who needs a mammogram?

If you're a woman age 40 or older—you do!

Talk with your primary care provider about breast cancer screening and prevention. Most insurance plans cover the cost of a mammogram. The exam is quick and discomfort is minimal.

The Center for Outpatient Services offers 3D Mammography which gives radiologists the ability to examine the breast one thin layer at a time. That's especially important for women with dense breast tissue. Clinical studies show it's able to detect 41% more invasive cancers and reduce the need for follow up visits by 40%.



To schedule your appointment in Niles, St. Joseph, or Watervliet, call **800.791.2810** or schedule online through MyChart.

This is big.

Preparing for your COVID-19 vaccine

While cancer patients, and people with a history of cancer, were not in the first phase the CDC recommended to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, they are now included in Michigan's vaccination plan. As vaccines become more widely available in our area, many people are wondering if the vaccine is safe for them to receive during or after treatment. In most cases, the answer is yes.

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe for cancer patients

The American Cancer Society recommends cancer patients, and people with a history of cancer, get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it becomes available. This is because cancer patients' fragile immune systems put them at a greater risk for severe COVID-19 including hospitalization or death.

"Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation, immunotherapy, and stem cell or bone marrow transplants can affect the immune system," medical oncologist, Sapna Patel, MD, said. "And that could impact the effectiveness of the vaccine."

However, Dr. Patel wants to make it clear that the vaccine is completely safe for people with cancer.

"When it comes to cancer patients and the COVID-19 vaccine, there is no question it is safe. The only thing that isn't clear is just how effective it will be at protecting people who have weakened immune systems."

This uncertainty is because the initial COVID-19 vaccine trials were among people with healthy immune systems.

Even though the information is inconclusive, if you are being treated for cancer you should get the vaccine. Making sure you have some protection is better than no protection at all.

Your doctor can help you manage side effects

Dr. Patel encourages all patients to talk to their doctor if they have concerns about the vaccine.

"Since every cancer patient's situation is different, your doctor can let you know how the vaccine will fit into your treatment plan," she said. "And they can help you prepare for timing your vaccine around or during treatment as well as the common side effects."

Those side effects may include headache, fever, chills, and muscle aches, as well as pain at the injection site, which will be your arm.

Breast cancer patients should be aware that swollen lymph nodes are another vaccine side effect. So, if you are currently diagnosed or have had breast cancer in the past, make sure to get the vaccine injection in the arm on the opposite side of your cancer.

Get scheduled for your vaccine

Vaccines are now available for all community members age 16 and older. Use the vaccine scheduling tool at spectrumhealthlakeland.org/vaccine to sign up, new appointment times are added as they become available.



Mental health support is key to holistic cancer care



A cancer diagnosis can make you feel like your life has been turned upside down. Day-to-day life becomes focused on doctor appointments and treatment plans, and you are faced with many months of not feeling like your normal, healthy self.

It's not surprising that feelings of anxiety and depression in cancer patients are incredibly common. The National Institutes of Health report that 60% of cancer patients experience some type of depression either during or after treatment.

Jamie Birris, PsyD, a psychologist with the psychosocial oncology services program at Spectrum Health Lakeland, said it is important to factor in mental health as part of your overall cancer treatment plan.

"Many cancer patients feel like they don't have time for counseling," said Dr. Birris. "But feeling depressed and anxious about cancer is expected, and that is exactly why we offer mental health services at Lakeland."

Including mental health care as part of cancer treatment and recovery

At Spectrum Health Lakeland new cancer patients complete a supportive care assessment and, depending on their needs and circumstances, are referred to a psychologist like Birris, or a social worker. The program is dedicated to helping cancer patients and their families navigate the cancer experience from the time they are diagnosed through treatment and recovery.

"Our oncologists check in with patients at every point along the cancer care journey," said Dr. Birris. "This is because depression and anxiety may not be apparent until several months into cancer treatment."

Strategies for coping and thriving

The psychosocial oncology program focuses on giving cancer patients and their families the necessary skills for coping with the different stressors of cancer. The goal is for every patient to maintain the best quality of life possible with resources such as:

- Behavioral coaching in self-care strategies
- Coping skills training and stress management
- Crisis intervention
- Instruction in relaxation skills and meditation techniques
- Marital and family therapy
- Non-pharmacological strategies for pain management
- Support groups

The program also offers social support including:

- Access to community resources
- Decision making and care planning
- Financial, insurance, and employment assistance
- Medicare, Medicaid, and disability help

Tell us how you feel

Dr. Birris' number one piece of advice for cancer patients worried about their mental health is don't ignore it. Talk to your doctors about the emotional difficulties you are experiencing. Tending to them is just as important as the lifesaving treatments you are bravely taking on.

Learn more about the psychosocial services at Spectrum Health Lakeland at spectrumhealthlakeland.org/cancermentalhealth



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I Quit Smoking. Now What?

If you've smoked in the past, you can take a free test and learn if you're eligible for a lung cancer screening.

After answering four simple questions from the comfort and privacy of your home, you'll immediately receive a risk score and information to help determine your next steps.

To get started, go to
spectrumhealthlakeland.org/lunghealth

