Smilow’s New Hospitalist Program Benefitting Patients, Physicians

A new program designed to further enhance patient care at Smilow Cancer Hospital launched its first Hospitalist Program in July 2021 with the participation of Erin Gombos, MD, Mathew Kottarathara, MD, Jensa Morris, MD, Nathaniel Parker, DO, Urs Weber, MD—and will expand to 10 later this year, including five physicians—Erin Gombos, MD, Mathew Kottarathara, MD, Jensa Morris, MD, Nathaniel Parker, DO, and Urs Weber, MD—and will expand to 10 later this year, including five physicians.

A new program designed to further enhance patient care, Smilow’s New Hospitalist Program was implemented to enhance the medical care of inpatients. Smilow Cancer Hospital launched its first Hospitalist Program in July 2021 with the participation of Erin Gombos, Mathew Kottarathara, Jensa Morris, Nathaniel Parker, and Urs Weber. "And our patients, so far, love it."

"The oncologists provide the oncologic expertise of the disease process, cancer therapies, side effects, and complications of therapy," Dr. Morris said. "And the hospitalists bring the management of general medical diseases and all the complications thereof."

Dr. Parker and his colleagues have a new position that allows him to focus on patients. "I have the opportunity to be a vital stakeholder in the overall continuum of patients’ care," he said. "This is important to me because I find patient care can be fragmented between the inpatient and ambulatory settings. I enjoy being a stakeholder who works towards eliminating that fragmentation."

The hospitalist’s work, while rewarding, is not easy. They typically work 12-hour shifts, seven days a week. Followed by seven days off. One works a 12-hour overnight shift. It can be a demanding position, but one, including Dr. Parker, don’t mind it. "I like the hustle and bustle. I enjoy the inpatient setting, the pace, and the breadth of content," said Dr. Morris. "I like the patient interaction and seeing results in real-time."

Dr. Gombos said she’s already been inspired by her new position. "My patients are the best part of the job," she said. "Everyone admitted to Smilow is on an incredible journey. By having the privilege to care for them, I have witnessed pure individuality, bravery, love, and loss. I believe everyone who works at Smilow appreciates this."

The Smilow Hospitalist Program is already making a significant difference in reducing patient hospital stay. "The business case was built on reducing patient stay by one-quarter of a day," Dr. Adelson said. "We actually reduced patient stay by 1.1 days, which is a huge number. That’s four times what was expected."

With much of the hospitalist’s daily focus on collaborating and coordinating with all physicians, care team members, and patients and families, effective communication is essential to the position. "The staff hospitalist must possess excellent communication skills and exhibit these through prompt and complete attention to all patient needs, from the mundane to the complicated."

Dr. Adelson was one of the first physicians at Yale New Haven Hospital to implement a practice 20 years ago and remains clinically active as a Smilow hospitalist. "There are more than 200 hospitalists in the Yale New Haven Health System, including those at Smilow."

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Dr. Adelson, a medical oncologist who specializes in breast cancer, said she’s constantly working to improve her communication skills, because the field of oncology—and the sensitive nature of some conversations the hospitalists require it. "The one thing that I’m still getting better at is my communication skills."

From in-person patient encounters to multidisciplinary rounds to phone calls/texts/emails to in-house consulting physicians, and colleagues, effective communication requires it. "I often tell my patients that my role as a hospitalist is to coordinate their entire stay, while ensuring their entire experience overall is kept up to date so that there is seamless transition when it is time for discharge."

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As the care given at hospitals is often misunderstood as meaning hospitalized patients. They are on staff around the clock to coordinate medical care among a team of physicians and specialists, analyze lab results, admit and discharge patients, and communicate with patients and family. "They really are experts on what medicines we still do. And it’s so important in terms of oncology, because we’re one of the last settings where patients can have these end-of-life communications, especially around end-of-life," Dr. Adelson said. "It is really the hardest thing and the highest art of medicine that we still do. And it’s so important in terms of aligning care with patient values and making sure that there’s an environment where they can express their wishes.

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Dr. Gombos explained how effective communication is imperative in the care that the work often involves nurses, nurse practitioners, residents, interns, medical students, pharmacists, the consulting oncologist or hematologist, and the hospitalists. "It can be confusing for patients when four or five providers walk into their rooms. Communicating upfront everyone’s name and role and providing a census list for the day is extremely important," she explained. "I often tell my patients that my role as a hospitalist is to coordinate their entire stay, while ensuring their entire experience overall is kept up to date so that there is seamless transition when it is time for discharge."

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