

At Moffitt, Patients Are Front and Center

By Mary Harvey

Care that is centered on the patient and family has been a part of the Moffitt Cancer Center culture since it opened in 1986. An important part of that culture is the Patient & Family Advisory Council.

Nancy Newman, who has been Moffitt’s director of Patient Support and Advocacy from the beginning, says the idea came from a conference she attended in 2004, where she learned of a similar program at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston.

“The overall goal of the council was to ensure safety and quality of care through a collaborative effort between patients, families and the institution,” Newman said. As she listened to the presentation, she knew it was a concept that would work perfectly at Moffitt.

“Essentially, the patients and families were to become partners with the institution in planning and implementing Moffitt programs that would ultimately benefit the patients and families.”

Four basic principles apply to all areas of the program:

- Dignity and respect for patients and families
- Open information-sharing among patients, families and their medical providers
- Participation by patients and families at the clinical level in decision-making
- Collaboration among patients, family members and the health care team

Kim Buettner, a five-year breast cancer survivor who has been patient co-chair of the council since 2006, called working on the council “an amazing experience. I have seen so much integration of the PFAC into committees throughout the Moffitt organization — not just small committees but committees that have a profound impact on the patient’s experience.”

“I can see that the work we are doing is benefiting the patients and families on a personal level,” Buettner said.

The advisory board’s patient and family members serve rotating terms of two years each. Initially the council was mostly advisory, but now it is also being used at the health care delivery level. The goals are to increase quality, safety and patient satisfaction levels.

An additional dozen or more unit-based advisors get extensive training in such issues as patient privacy and talking with people who have just been diagnosed with cancer. “The great thing is that they can speak as one cancer patient to another, but they also know when it is appropriate to bring in someone from social services,” Newman said.

Additional advisors work in the clinics to help patients who are new to Moffitt or are there alone and need personal assistance, she said.

“Sometimes it is as simple as getting them from one appointment to another, but in many cases, our advisors have followed patients through a clinic day or even an entire hospital stay. I remember one patient who came here for surgery and had no family member with him. One of our advisors spent the pre-op day taking him around for his appointments and then met him at the door early the next morning and escorted him to surgery.”

“She spent the whole day in the surgery waiting room so this patient would know he was not alone. She also visited him every day while he was hospitalized. This is the spirit of people that volunteer to be a part of our organization. They have all experienced cancer on one level or another, and this is what they do to give back,” Newman said. “It really is amazing.”