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**Bringing Cutting
Edge Cancer Care
to Georgia**

Georgia NCORP
Spearheads Statewide
Research Collaboration

Bringing Cutting-Edge Cancer Care Across Georgia

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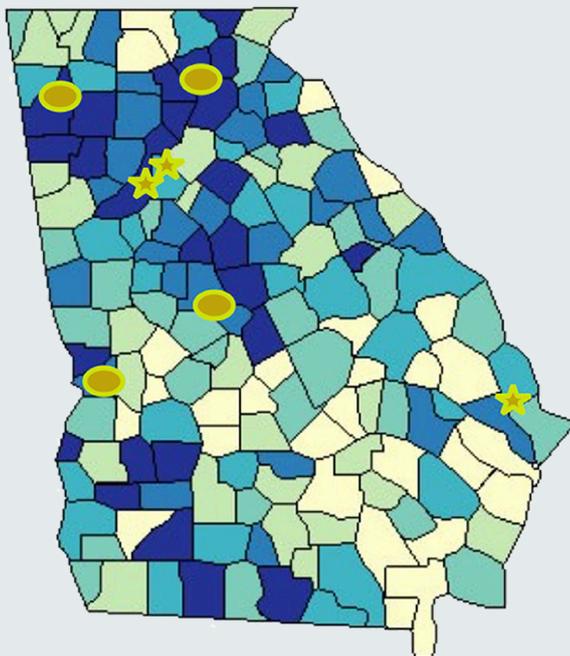
By Helen K. Kelley

A statewide initiative involving multiple hospitals and healthcare organizations is poised to bring the latest in cancer research and care to communities throughout the state of Georgia. This unprecedented partnership, sponsored by Northside Hospital Cancer Institute, was selected by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) as a NCI Community Oncology Research Program (NCORP). The designation includes a five-year, \$5.85-million grant.

The partnership application was developed jointly by Northside Hospital Cancer Institute and the Nancy N. and J.C. Lewis Cancer & Research Pavilion, part of St. Joseph's/Candler Health System in Savannah. Known as the Georgia NCORP, the partnership also includes the Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education (Georgia CORE).

The Georgia NCORP will provide Georgians with access to state-of-the-art cancer prevention, screening,

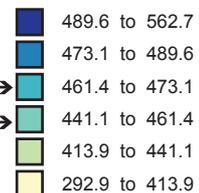
Georgia NCORP Affiliates and Cancer Incidence by County



Age-Adjusted
Cancer Incidence Rate

(Cases per 100,00)

[Quantile Interval](#)



US (SEER + NPCR)
Rate (95% C.I.)
453.7 (453.4 - 454.0)

Georgia
Rate (95% C.I.)
464.6 (462.5 - 466.6)

★ Partners

Northside Hospital Cancer Institute
St. Joseph's/Candler Lewis Cancer & Research Pavilion
Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education

● Members

Harbin Clinic, Rome
John B. Amos Cancer Center at Columbus Regional Health, Columbus
Navicent Health Medical Center, Macon
Northeast Georgia Medical Center, Gainesville

Map created by the Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education with data from the National Cancer Institute State Cancer Profiles.

The community-based approach to cancer research has the potential to remove the barriers of location, age, ethnicity and economic status for all Georgia residents when it comes to accessing care.

control, treatment and post-treatment trials, with 110 oncology clinical providers in 41 different locations throughout the state, as well as the clinical trial leadership and research management services of Georgia CORE.

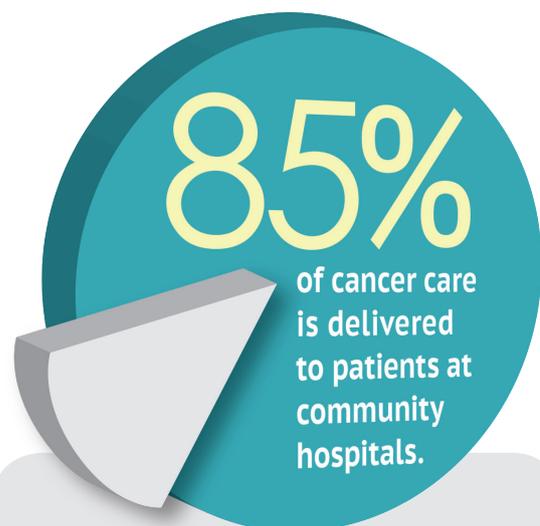
“Eighty-five percent of cancer care is delivered to patients at community hospitals, and only 15 percent at academic centers,” says Northside Hospital Cancer Institute’s Dr. Guilherme Cantuaria, who served as principal investigator for the partnership as it developed its application and will continue to coordinate the program. “The only way to improve delivery is by engaging our community healthcare facilities. Therefore, the overall goal of the Georgia NCORP is to bring cancer care and cancer delivery research to people right where they live.”

Tailored to Community-Specific Needs

Georgia NCORP will focus on offering research trials that address the needs of different communities, according to Dr. Cantuaria.

“All tumor sites will be studied, and all communities will be able to tailor the type of research trials they want to open according to their specific needs,” he says. “For example, Northside Hospital has a tremendous number of breast cancer and gynecological oncology patients. So it’s possible we’ll have more patients accrued to these trials as opposed to another community in Georgia that has a large population of smokers and high incidence of lung cancer.”

The purpose of customizing clinical trials by community is not only to identify the origin of various tumor sites, but also to identify the types of mutations exhibited by specific cancer cells and thereby develop the most successful treatments for those mutations.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Georgia Department of Public Health:

- Georgia is ranked 25th in cancer incidence and 23rd in cancer deaths in the U.S.
- Cancer remains the second leading cause of death in Georgia.
- Prostate cancer accounts for 30 percent of new cancer cases, with the highest concentration in southwest Georgia.
- Breast cancer represents 31 percent of all new cancer cases, with the highest concentration in metro Atlanta.
- Lung cancer is the second most common among both males and females and is diagnosed most frequently in rural Georgia.

“We’re now in an era of genomic medicine, of targeted treatments. That’s where the NCI is going with this research,” says Dr. Cantuaria. “The latest clinical trials are focused on finding drugs that target specific cancer cell mutations.”

Improving Statewide Access to Cancer Research

While clinical trials and research are readily available to people who live in or near large urban areas, those who live in rural areas and less populated cities are not as fortunate.

“Historically, many of Georgia’s citizens have been challenged to find the cancer care resources they need – we have Atlanta ... and then there’s the rest of the state,” says Nancy M. Paris, president and CEO of Georgia CORE. “We’ve brought together

The Georgia NCORP will provide Georgians with access to state-of-the-art cancer prevention, screening, control, treatment and post-treatment trials, with 110 oncology clinical providers in 41 different locations throughout the state, as well as the clinical trial leadership and research management services of Georgia CORE.

strong cancer centers in Rome [Harbin Clinic], Columbus [John B. Amos Cancer Center], Macon [Navicent Health Center] and Gainesville [Northeast Georgia Medical Center] to create a collaboration of research as members of the Georgia NCORP in their own communities.”

In recent years, Georgia CORE participated in an opportunity with NCI to expand gynecological oncology trials throughout the state, creating a consortium of nine institutions. That experience, says Paris, proved that a collaborative effort could reach and fulfill an unmet healthcare need.

“This cooperative group within the NCI taught us that we can do more collectively than individually,” she says. “We learned that by expanding our resources to various centers and geographic regions, we are able to reach a broader, more diverse population.”

Based on its demonstrated effectiveness in working on NCI-sponsored studies, Georgia CORE was asked to provide clinical trial leadership and research management services as a partner in the Georgia NCORP.

“What we bring to the table is that we’re the mechanism by which cancer centers in Georgia have found ways to work together. We’ve conducted investigator-initiated clinical trials, and we’ve built a database in which all clinical trials and physicians and treatment centers in the state are listed as a resource for patients and professionals,” Paris says. “Georgia NCORP’s goal is to offer people the ability to get the best care at home. We’d love to see cancer patients look first at what’s available in Georgia, in their own communities.”

Importance of Community-Based Research

The NCI’s shift to community healthcare centers is significant, according to Dr. Cantuaria.

“For many years, the NCI focused on research at academic centers,” he says. “The community is the best place for testing the feasibility of new inventions and

new processes in the delivery of healthcare. And since the majority of cancer care is provided in the community, community-based research is very valuable – because it samples from a diverse, ‘real-world’ population, rather than a biased one.”

Howard A. Zaren, M.D., a surgical oncologist and

medical director for the Nancy N. and J.C. Lewis Cancer & Research Pavilion in Savannah, says that this change of focus brings an unprecedented opportunity for people who live in Georgia’s rural areas and smaller cities.

“Atlanta’s great for cancer care choices – if you happen to live there,” he says. “But if you live in smaller towns, there are no cancer physicians. So, this opportunity ... the forming of Georgia NCORP ... represents the first time that delivery of cancer care and research will be accessible throughout the state. That’s a huge change.”

Georgia NCORP will make clinical trials and cancer care available to previously underserved populations – groups that exhibit increasing incidence of cancer and experience socioeconomic depression – including the medically underserved, minorities, the elderly, women and young adults. The benefits of this partnership are far-reaching – researchers will have the opportunity to develop specific trials, measure their results, evaluate their success and tailor delivery of care within various communities. And cancer patients throughout Georgia will be able to take part in NCI-sponsored trials without having to travel long distances or leave their loved ones.

The community-based approach to cancer research has the potential to remove the barriers of location, age, ethnicity and economic status for all Georgia residents when it comes to accessing care.

“We’re passionate about making sure that Georgians can receive cancer care that’s as good or better than anywhere else. We’re in the top 20 states for cancer diagnosis in the country. We have a big incidence, and we have to take care of our population,” says Dr. Zaren. “The Georgia NCORP is a really big deal for us [as researchers and physicians] and a really big deal for patients in Georgia.” ■