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An achievement built on teamwork

For the past year, untold numbers of people have worked tirelessly and with tremendous dedication to help the Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute achieve certification as the charter member of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Alliance. It has been a comprehensive and demanding process that required a thorough examination — and in some cases, re-examination — of how the cancer programs within the Institute provide care to patients.

Now our Institute is on the cusp of achieving its goal, as we move toward a Sept. 16 date for officially obtaining certification and becoming the first health care organization ever to become formally linked with the world-renowned experts at MSK.

An effort of this magnitude means that many people who have made contributions, both large and small, may not receive the individual recognition they deserve. So let me say here on behalf of everyone who helped make this pioneering rela-

■ **Special thanks for the incredible display of discretionary effort to the following departments and teams: Marketing, Decision Support, Finance, Cancer Registry, Pharmacy, Radiology, Peri-Op Services, Nursing, Laboratory Services**

tionship with MSK a reality: Thank you.

Thank you to the surgeons, oncologists, radiologists, nurses and the countless other clinicians within the Institute who recognized the enormous potential for this effort to improve outcomes for patients, and devoted their time and expertise to help make it happen. Thank you to the executive leaders, physician leaders, team leaders, administrators, assistants and other support staff who helped create, from scratch, the infrastructure that will make this partnership successful. This effort demonstrated how departments across each organization and the system came together to make this happen. This work could not have been done were it not for the support of other staff members who were willing to take on new responsibilities.

Thank you also to our new friends and colleagues at MSK, who have done so much over the past year to provide invaluable insight and support as they worked hand-in-hand with us to analyze our programs and processes, and identify ways to bring them into alignment with their standards.

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The beginning of something big

Sept. 16 celebration marks HHC's official membership in MSK Cancer Alliance

As the Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute (HHCCI) moves closer to achieving certification as the charter member of the Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) Cancer Alliance, teams of experts from both organizations are busily finalizing the process of analyzing and adopting

new standards across the Institute in time for Sept. 16 celebrations marking the Institute's official certification as a member of the MSK Cancer Alliance.

Those celebrations will include a press conference; a special symposium for physicians focused on molecular oncology and other promising trends

in cancer care; and a public forum in which experts will answer questions from patients and the community about how care is changing as a result of the Institute's participation in the Alliance, and what will be available in the future.

The events are meant to highlight

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MSK ranks first nationally for cancer care

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center was named the number one hospital for cancer care in the nation, according to *U.S. News & World Report* in its 2014 listing of Best Hospitals.

Since the inception of the *U.S. News & World Report* list 25 years ago, MSK has held either the first or second spot for cancer care each year.

“We are delighted and honored to once again be a top hospital for cancer,” said MSK President and CEO Craig B. Thompson, MD. “But this recognition is really a reflection of an entire community of exceptional people — our dedicated staff of almost 13,000 and our patients, who have placed their trust in our care. We may be number one in the

national rankings for this year, but our patients are number one to us every day.”

The rankings recognized hospitals that excel in treating the most challenging patients. In addition to its ranking for cancer care, MSK was ranked number four for gynecology, number nine for urology, and number 28 for ear, nose, and throat, and was recognized as high performing in the fields of gastroenterology and gastrointestinal surgery and geriatrics.

Just 3% of the nearly 5,000 hospitals analyzed earned national ranking in even one specialty. Per *U.S. News & World Report*, hospitals that rank nationally in any specialty have the skill and experience to treat the

most complex and demanding cases that can arise in that area.

MSK was also ranked among the nation’s top pediatric hospitals.

The *U.S. News & World Report* rankings are determined using a complex set of factors. These include the hospital’s reputation among board-certified physician specialists around the nation, patient survival and safety data, and adequacy of nurse staffing levels, among other criteria.

For a complete list and methodology of rankings, please visit <http://health.usnews.com/best-hospitals>.

The information for this story comes directly from Memorial Sloan Kettering and is used with MSK’s permission.



Memorial Sloan Kettering staff members celebrate MSK’s top ranking in the latest *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of cancer centers across the country.

Mobile mammography unit saves the day

Mary Witek was all set to book a Caribbean vacation last year when she got a call from her fitness center at her workplace in Windsor reminding her to make an appointment with the Hartford HealthCare Mobile Mammography Program.

Though she has no family history of cancer, and had not noticed anything unusual with her health, Witek remembers hesitating to book the trip after scheduling her mammography in late January of last year.

"I don't know what it was, but for some reason I just kept holding off," said Witek, 48. "I guess it was fate letting me know I was going to be busy doing something else for the next few months."

Witek received her mammogram inside the specially equipped coach that the Mobile Mammography Program uses to provide mammograms to women at locations across the Greater Hartford area. She remembers going to her appointment in the coach, which was set up outside the fitness center, on Jan. 31, 2013. But she only recalls a few details of the call she received from a radiologist 10 days later telling her some suspicious findings had been spotted in her exam, and that she needed to schedule a biopsy.

"I remember him saying he was sorry, and then the word carcinoma, and that's it. I went numb," she said. "I called my primary care doctor as



Outside the Hartford HealthCare Mobile Mammography coach are, from left, Diana Gonzalez, mobile mammography patient registrar; Samia Hussein, community liaison; Gerry Cyr, mobile mammography driver; patient Mary Witek; Beth Organ-Rodriguez, mammography technologist; and Karen Weingrod, manager of the Breast Program at Hartford Hospital.

soon as I got off the phone with the radiologist. It was late on a Friday, the last call of the day that the doctor's office took, and I arranged to come in first thing the following Monday."

Subsequent tests confirmed that Witek had stage one breast cancer. Because the cancer was detected early enough, Witek was able to avoid chemotherapy and was treated with eight weeks of radiation at Hartford Hospital. Within just a few months of her diagnosis, Witek's doctors found that she had no more signs of cancer, and she has remained in remission ever since.

Witek said the care she received at Hartford Hospital was exceptional, singling out her physicians, Helaine Bertsch, MD, and Stacy Nerenstone, MD. But it was the Mobile Mammography program which saved her life, she said.

"I was always that person who put off doctors appointments; I just never got around to it," she

said. "If it wasn't for the mobile mammography coach coming to my community, I never would have made that appointment."

Witek said she sometimes thinks of how far her cancer may have progressed if she had not received the mammogram when she did.

"Who knows where I would be now?" she said. "I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be where I am today."

To show her appreciation, Witek recently returned to visit and thank the staff of experts who work in the mobile mammography coach, including Elizabeth Organ-Rodriguez, the mammography tech who gave Witek her initial exam.

"It's so great to see her here. She's really why we do what we do," said Rodriguez. "One of the most rewarding things about my work is that you get to follow up on the people you treat and you get to really see the difference you helped to make for that person."

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Helping patients ‘bounce back’

Cancer patients at Hartford Hospital were recently given a little something extra to help them in their struggle to overcome the disease.

Patients were given colorful bracelets woven from elastic bands with messages of hope attached – “You can do it!” or “You’ve Got This!” – written in crayon and signed from “The Bouncing Back Club.”

The club was formed just months ago by 10-year-old Keeley Joyal and her friend, 11-year-old Lindsay Masamery, schoolmates who live across the street from each other in Somers. Their friendship goes back to early childhood, but recently they developed an even stronger bond — their mothers have both been diagnosed with cancer.

Instead of giving in to sadness or depression, the girls decided to help their moms with a campaign built around hope and inspiration. They consulted with Keeley’s fifth-grade teacher, Tenley Stoltz, to encourage students and staff at their school to help them weave over 500 rubber-band bracelets with handwritten messages attached.

It didn’t take long for the girls to fill up two boxes with the bracelets. In July, they came to the cancer center at Hartford Hospital to deliver the bracelets to patients, as Stoltz and their proud mothers looked on.

“I’m just so proud of them because of the way they have used this situation to learn how to think outside of themselves and try to help others,” said Julie Masamery, who was diag-

nosed with stage three breast cancer in 2009 and is currently in remission. Julie has been a nurse at Hartford Hospital for 18 years, and is now a clinical leader on the Bliss 8 floor.

Keeley’s mom, Katie, was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer in May. She said the girls have given her powerful incentive to stay positive through her treatment and not give in to despair.

“They are setting an example for us as much as we are for them,” she said.

During their recent visit to the cancer center, the girls distributed bracelets to patients in the infusion center, where they brought smiles to several people who were undergoing chemotherapy.

“Well, isn’t this a pleasant surprise!” said Donata Banks of Torrington, who has been in treatment for several years. She picked out a bracelet and then hugged each of the girls.

William Grady of West Hartford, who has been battling brain cancer for several years, said the bracelets send an important message to patients who might feel alone in their struggle.

“It’s so gratifying to know there are people out there rooting for us, even if we’ve never met them,” he said. “These girls have done a wonderful thing. I admire them.”

Andrew L. Salner, MD, medical director of the cancer center, said he was impressed with the girls’ spirit.

“Here are a couple of young girls whose mothers have been diagnosed with cancer, and they take that expe-



Top: Lindsay Masamery, left, and Keeley Joyal, with the hundreds of handmade elastic bracelets they brought to the cancer center at Hartford Hospital.

Above: Lindsay Masamery gets a hug from patient Donata Banks.

rience and turn it into something so positive for people who need it most,” he said.

The girls, for their part, said they were simply happy to see the patients smile.

“It’s good to know you can help brighten someone’s day,” said Lindsay.

On the cover

Dawn Filippa, RN, an instructor at Hartford HealthCare’s Center for Education, Simulation and Innovation (CESI), center, watches as Ryan Kopp, MD, left, and Miriam Imnadze, MD, practice and are timed on specialized surgical tools. Dr. Kopp and Dr. Imnadze are surgical Fellows at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center who recently came to CESI for advanced training.



How to reach us

- **By phone:** Call the Cancer Connect line at 855-255-6181.
- **Online:** Visit www.togetherahead.org
- **On Facebook:** Like the Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute Facebook page at www.facebook.com/HHCCancerInstitute.

