

The East End is still a tough place to have cancer

**Despite new centers,
the area remains underserved**

By **BERNADETTE STARZEE**

Last August, the Ellen Hermanson Breast Health Center opened at Southampton Hospital, expanding breast cancer services on the East End. The center put diagnostic, treatment, wellness and genetic counseling services, including the services of a breast surgeon, under one roof.

While applauding the opening of the new Southampton center, Lorraine Pace, co-founder of Breast Cancer Help Inc., said the eastern part of Suffolk County remains underserved for cancer care. "The East End needs more specialists who attend all the conferences and are on the cutting edge of diagnostic tests and treatments," she said.

Many East End cancer patients travel to the Stony Brook University Cancer Center, whose diagnostic and surgical network covers 98 percent of adult and pediatric cancers. "The travel time is difficult, particularly for people from the Hamptons in the summer and from anywhere out east in bad weather," said Dr. Theodore G. Gabig, acting director of the cancer center. "While not so much a problem for routine appointments, it's a bigger issue when patients have an acute problem between treatments." For instance, he said, a fairly common

side effect for patients undergoing radiation treatment is difficulty in swallowing, a condition that necessitates urgent admittance to the nearest hospital. "For such cases, the region would benefit from an inter-hospital transportation network that would bring the patient to the cancer center," he said.

Cancer patients from places like Montauk and East Hampton have to drive to Riverhead or Stony Brook to receive radiation sometimes as many as five times per week, said Karrie Robinson, director of clinical services and programs for Fighting Chance, a nonprofit organization founded eight years ago in Sag Harbor by Duncan Darrow, who had trouble finding resources when his mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. The organization publishes and distributes a patient guide and mans a help line, providing education, referrals and other services to 300 to 400 families annually.

According to Robinson, cancer is a growing concern in the East End as the population ages. "Advancing age is the greatest risk factor for cancer," she said.

There is help on the horizon. Brookhaven Breast Health Services, affiliated with Brookhaven Memorial Hospital Medical Center in Patchogue, is expanding and combining its breast cancer services into one state-of-the-art facility, which is expected to open in June, said Dr. David Mangiameli, associate director and a surgical oncologist



Bob Gignone

Lorraine Pace, co-founder of Breast Cancer Help Inc., said the eastern part of Suffolk County needs more cancer specialists.

specializing in breast surgery. The center recently purchased a couple of surgeons' practices and will soon house three surgeons and several radiologists under one roof.

According to Dr. Mangiameli, the new center will address a lack of coordination of cancer care in the area, a reason, he believes, that when "many patients in Eastern Long Island are diagnosed with a malignancy, their first reflex is to run west."

Despite the push to treat breast cancer

patients, the East End lacks centers for other common cancers. "We would like to see similar centers for men's cancers, lung cancer and other cancers with a high incidence," said Win Boerckel, director of social services in the Woodbury office of Cancer-Care, a national nonprofit organization that assists patients with advanced cancer.

Boerckel noted that East End residents would benefit if a satellite office of a National Cancer Institute-designated facility, such as Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center or the NYU Cancer Institute, opened farther east. Memorial Sloan-Kettering currently has satellite offices in Commack and Rockville Centre that connect patients to specialized services at the main facility in New York.

However, Boerckel said, it's a difficult time for hospitals to expand services just as they are facing severe cutbacks in government funding.

Another issue is the East End's physician shortage. Marsha Kenny, director of marketing and public affairs for Southampton Hospital, said many local physicians are approaching retirement age. She added that while Southampton Hospital aggressively recruits physicians, the high cost of living is a roadblock. To help combat this problem, Southampton recently started a medical education program, bringing interns and residents to the hospital with the hope that many of them will stay after graduation.