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CANCER INSTITUTE

2020 Chairman's Report

It comes as no surprise that COVID-19 was a dominant influence in the University of Tennessee Medical Center Cancer Institute for most of 2020. This pandemic required creativity, adaptation, persistence from providers, individuals with cancer and family members. Despite these challenges, the Cancer Institute was able to increase capacity to care for more individuals than in 2019. The effort, commitment and perseverance from all involved is worth highlighting.

First, I want to acknowledge and applaud the nurses, phlebotomists, integrative health specialists,



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therapists, health care providers, administrators, and support staff that remained steadfast in their work and care throughout the year. Despite uncertainty, workplace disruptions and additional daily work requirements, the excellent care provided was not impacted. Chemotherapy was administered, radiation was delivered, and surgery was performed with minimal disruption in following standard of care and timeliness. Our tumor boards transitioned to a virtual format and similar numbers of cases were presented compared to 2019. Ellen Perkins, our Tumor Registry Manager, was a 2020 hero in her efforts to ensure these conferences persisted. The quality of the virtual tumor conferences has been so good, many providers desire to continue the on-line format even after the pandemic is over. Additionally, the transition to telehealth was an overdue change in the delivery of healthcare. Our IT department provided equipment and software for this transition to

happen quickly and at a high quality. Many high risk individuals were able to have treatment plans discussed and reviewed from the safety of their home. One of my favorite memories of 2020 was the effort made from numerous members of the Cancer Institute to make high quality masks for providers, employees and patients. I was impressed at the creativity and talent of many our team members.

Second, I want to acknowledge the role of family and friends for many of our patients. The challenges of navigating cancer care are numerous and 2020 added many new layers of complexity. Many family members had to wait in cars during visits, try to glean hope through visits broadcast via cell phones, and endure the additional check-in requirements. I was impressed with the strong spirit of these family members and friends. I want to thank each family member for remaining patient, adapting to the changing requirements and allowing the Cancer Institute the space to figure out best processes.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the brave patients with cancer who endured procedures, treatments and care during this difficult year. Many endured treatment and surgery in isolation and separation from family and

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friends. Often in tough times, individuals rise to the occasion, and this year was no different. These individuals adapted, found new ways to support each other, and overcame the fear and challenges of a cancer diagnosis during a pandemic. I am often inspired by the individuals I am privileged to care for and this year brought that level of inspiration to new highs.

Despite the impact of COVID-19, an important new program took root this year. The UTMC Cellular Therapy service has been created. Under the leadership of Dr. Ramchandren, the Cellular Therapy transplant physicians have been recruited, plans for the new Cellular Therapy floor have been completed and inpatient and outpatient services have been developed which will support this new program. The team will be ready to begin performing transplants in 2021. This service brings a much needed option for those diagnosed with leukemia and lymphoma in the region rather than having to leave the community for treatment.

As we look ahead to 2021, we anticipate continued growth especially in services offered. We anticipate expanding radiation options, clinical trial options, surgical options and integrative health options. I look forward to this coming year for the opportunity to be innovative, expand the options for cure, and continue to work towards improving quality of life for those with a diagnosis of cancer and their support community.

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