



# ST. PETER'S HEALTH

## CANCER TREATMENT CENTER FAQ

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*As we continue our collaborative efforts to design the future of cancer treatment in Helena, here are the answers to questions we are frequently asked.*

### **Are you accepting new patients?**

Yes. Our Cancer Treatment Center (CTC) is fully operational and providing comprehensive cancer care including medical oncology, hematology and radiation oncology.

### **Who is providing this patient care?**

In addition to Dr. Andrew Cupino, who is board certified in radiation oncology, we are actively recruiting new permanent oncologists to join our Cancer Treatment Center. In the meantime, we have locum tenens oncologists providing care alongside our team of nurse navigators, nurses, technicians and office staff.

### **What are locum tenens physicians and how long should we expect them to stay at St. Peter's?**

Locum tenens are fully licensed physicians who choose to travel and practice for a period of time in various locations. Locum tenens are common in most hospitals and health systems. They determine the length of their assignments and often pick locations based on their passion for a certain geography,

proximity to family, or opportunities that are unique to a specific program. We're fortunate that Helena and St. Peter's have always been attractive to locum tenens physicians when we need them to cover vacancies, vacations or help start new services.

**I've heard that patients don't see the same locum tenens physician more than once. Is that correct?**

The locum tenens physicians determine how long they want to practice in any location. Some choose to stay for months at a time, and others for just a week. Regardless, they all are highly skilled and carefully chart their patient interactions for anyone else providing care to the patient in the future. Like our permanent medical staff, we have a rigorous screening and interview process in place to make sure these physicians are a good fit for St. Peter's and our community.

**How is the CTC staff faring working with the locum tenens physicians?**

While all transitions are challenging, our CTC team is doing well overall. We continue to be impressed by their unwavering focus on caring for patients. St. Peter's Health is surrounding them with the physician, administrative and other support they need to continue to provide top-notch care to patients in Helena and the surrounding communities.

**When will the CTC have permanent physicians?**

We are actively recruiting for board certified oncologists to join our CTC. Additionally, Dr. Andrew Cupino, who is board certified in radiation oncology, has been a full-time member of the St. Peter's Cancer Treatment Center since 2012.

**Is St. Peter's considering an affiliation with the University of Utah's Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI)?**

Yes. St. Peter's is excited to be in conversations with the Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) to bring world-class cancer care to Helena. This is an incredible opportunity to connect our patients with some of the nation's top oncology specialists and available cancer treatment, without having to travel

to a major city. The expertise and support that a renowned cancer program like Huntsman can provide to a small community like Helena represents a huge step toward St. Peter's becoming the gold standard for oncology care.

### **Does the affiliation mean St. Peter's is selling out to HCI or University of Utah Health?**

No, quite the opposite, actually. Formal affiliations with other health systems strengthen St. Peter's ability to remain independent because we can offer services, specialties or expertise through these partnerships that we wouldn't otherwise be able to offer locally. HCI has several affiliates throughout the Mountain West and all are independent community hospitals like St. Peter's Health. Our staff and providers benefit from specialized education and continuing medical education (CME) opportunities. Our leaders have an added layer of operational support, guidance and clinical oversight in managing our cancer program. Like our other affiliations, St. Peter's physicians maintain the autonomy to refer their cancer patients to any hospital or health system they deem most appropriate for the patient or their family.

### **Why HCI?**

A partnership with HCI builds on the strength of our affiliation with University of Utah Health and brings world-class cancer care to Helena. HCI is ranked among the best cancer hospitals in the country by *U.S. News and World Report* and they score in the top 1% nationally for patient satisfaction. In a rural community like Helena, delivering gold standard cancer care is more likely achieved through a partnership with a high-performing organization than it is independently. A team approach where providers share insights and support one another builds strength in diagnosis and treatment, and greatly benefits patients.

### **When will the HCI partnership be formalized?**

We're deep into conversations and contract negotiation. We look forward to sharing more information when we reach a formal agreement and decision.

## **Who is involved in planning and designing the future of cancer care at St. Peter's?**

This is a highly collaborative process that involves many people.

Administration and CTC leadership are working closely with providers, staff, and members of the organization's leadership team and board of directors. A cancer center steering committee and "unified path forward" initiative were established to engage multiple perspectives, including frontline staff, in helping to design the future of our cancer care program. Together, these representatives are identifying improvements to the physical space, optimizing processes and workflows, and reimagining how cancer care can be delivered at St. Peter's. In the coming months, you will see many positive changes begin to take place as a result of the great work.

## **Who do patients contact if they have specific questions regarding their care?**

Cancer Treatment Center (CTC) patients with questions about their care can call the CTC at 406-444-2381 or Patient Advocacy at 447-2566.

## **Who should members of the community contact with questions or concerns about these CTC changes?**

Please submit feedback to the St. Peter's Health Board and Administration at [CTCfeedback@sphealth.org](mailto:CTCfeedback@sphealth.org), or by calling 444-2100 (option 1) or 444-2101.