Yale Cancer Center

Smilow’s New Hospitalist Program Beneﬁts Patients, Physician

A new program designed to further enhance patient care at Smilow Cancer Hospital is already making a difference for treating hospitalized patients. Two or six, seven physicians are dedicated to inpatient care, analyzing lab results, admitting and discharging patients, and communicating with patients and families. They are an expert at navigating the hospital system and are available around the clock to admit and discharge patients.

The Smilow Hospitalist Program is already making a significant difference in reducing patient hospital stays. "This is a big step in reducing patient stays by one-quarter of a day," Dr. Adelson said. "We've reduced our patient hospital stays by one-quarter of a day, which is a huge number. That's four times what was reported." The key is in the hospitalist's ability to manage general medical diseases as well as navigate the hospital system and be available around the clock to admit and discharge patients. "A hospital is probably the most complex system you could work in, in terms of figuring out where to get the resources and determining how to get things done," Dr. Morris said. "Hospitalists manage the day-to-day care with prompt and complete attention to all patient needs, from the mundane to the complicated." Dr. Adelson was one of the first hospitalists when Yale New Haven Hospital began its program 20 years ago and remains clinically active as a Smilow hospitalist. There are now more than 200 hospitalists in the Yale New Haven Health System, including those at Smilow.

"I think the Smilow Hospitalist Program is going to be so rewarding that we can't even describe it," Dr. Adelson said. "The patients love having a doctor who spends time with them and is always accessible." With much of the hospitalists' daily focus on collaborating and coordinating with all physicians, care team members, and patients and families, effective communication is essential to the position. "The staff hospitalist must possess excellent communication skills and exhibit those through communication with primary oncologists, hematologists, in-house consulting physicians, and colleagues," Dr. Morris said. "Dr. Parker agrees good communications skills are important. "From in-person patient encounters to multidisciplinary rounds to phone call conferences between other specialists or attending physicians and beyond, it's simply such an important part of being a hospitalist," he said. "It's truly a skill and something I'm always trying to improve." Dr. Gombos explained how effective communication is imperative in the care the team often includes nurses, nurse practitioners, residents, interns, medical students, pharmacists, the coordinating oncologist or hematologist, and the hospital pharmacist. "It can be confusing for patients when four or five providers walk into their room. Communicating upfront everyone's name and role and providing a clear plan for the day is extremely important," she explained. "I often tell my patients that my role as a hospitalist is to coordinate their inpatient stay, while ensuring their outpatient providers are kept up to date so there is seamless transition when it is time for discharge." Dr. Adelson, a medical oncologist who specializes in breast cancer, said she's constantly working to improve her communication skills, because the field of oncology—and the sensitive nature of some conversations the doctor requires it. "The one thing that I'm still getting better at is being heard in communications, especially around end of life," Dr. Adelson said. "It's really the hardest thing and the highest act of medicine that we still do. And it's so important in terms of aligning care with patient values and making sure that there's an environment where they can express their wishes."

"These hospitalists are going to become experts at that form of communication because they're doing it all day long every day, and they're also seeing the impact. They really are experts in medicine and inpatient care."

As the name implies, hospitalists treat hospitalized patients. They are one of the first to admit a patient to the hospital, coordinate medical care among a team of physicians and specialists, analyze lab results, admit and discharge patients, and communicate with patients and families. "They really are experts at acute medicine and inpatient care," said Dr. Parker. "And they've got a unique role in being able to coordinate care between inpatient and outpatient settings." Dr. Adelson said she's already been inspired by her new position. "Any hospitalists are the best part of the job," she said. "Everyone at Smilow appreciates this. It's an incredibly busy way of having the privilege to care for them, where we've witnessed such individual bravery, love, and joy. I believe everyone who works at Smilow appreciates this." The Smilow Hospitalist Program is already making a significant difference in reducing patient hospital stays. "The biggest difference was in reducing patient stay by one-quarter of a day," Dr. Adelson said. "We've reduced our patient hospital stays by one-quarter of a day, which is a huge number. That's four times what was reported." That's open lines for all patients who need it. The key is in the hospitalist's ability to manage general medical diseases as well as navigate the hospital system and be available around the clock to admit and discharge patients. "A hospital is probably the most complex system you could work in, in terms of figuring out where to get the resources and determining how to get things done," Dr. Morris said. "Hospitalists manage the day-to-day care with prompt and complete attention to all patient needs, from the mundane to the complicated." Dr. Adelson was one of the first hospitalists when Yale New Haven Hospital began its program 20 years ago and remains clinically active as a Smilow hospitalist. There are now more than 200 hospitalists in the Yale New Haven Health System, including those at Smilow.

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