The Cardio-Oncology Program at Smilow Cancer Hospital is designed to help address the cardio-toxic side effects of cancer treatment, as well as the confounding problem of co-existing cardiac disease and cancer. Directed by Dr. Lauren A. Baldassarre, the program also provides pre-surgical and pre-treatment cardiac evaluation for patients with cancer.

The service began in response to data indicating that certain drugs for cancer treatment can have unanticipated cardiac side effects. Such therapies include anthracyclines and Herceptin which are very effective in the treatment of breast cancer, and many other treatments for other cancers, such as chemotherapies, tyrosine kinase inhibitors, radiation therapy and immunotherapy agents, which can affect the heart.

The difficulty when dealing with these kinds of side effects is that they can often mask themselves as normal effects from the cancer treatment itself, such as fatigue and shortness of breath, and often there may not be any symptoms initially. If it is determined that a patient has a pre-existing heart dysfunction, Dr. Baldassarre and her team can help make decisions of how treatment can be optimized, and establish what the baseline function is for continued monitoring.
If a patient is found to have cardio-toxicities during treatment with chemotherapy, the oncologist, the patient, and the Cardio-Oncology Program will work together to decide what the best course of action is. There are many methods for treating mild heart failure, which would be beneficial if the cancer is responding to the current therapy. In some cases, collaboration with the oncologist will need to take place in order to change the therapy to something that’s more tolerable. The point is to kill the cancer cells, without damaging other areas. This Program aims to help patients through their treatment so they have the best chance to be cured of their cancer.

Giving a patient as much information as possible about their treatment plan and what to expect is crucial. The goal of the Cardio-Oncology Program at Smilow Cancer Hospital is to provide specialty care for patients who have cancer to help them not only deal with the effects of their chemotherapy on their heart, but also to evaluate patients with co-existing cardiac disease and cancer for specialized therapy where there may be increased risk to the heart.

With new cancer therapeutic agents being developed, people are living much longer lives and a healthy heart is crucial to being able to enjoy that.

For more information, to refer a patient, or to schedule an appointment, please call (203) 785-7867.