Choosing to make a difference

Clinical trials help physicians improve cancer treatment

At 67, Michael Farmer appeared healthy, trekked 2,000 miles a year on his bicycle and was active at his sports footwear and apparel store. He never would have guessed anything was seriously wrong, until he was rushed to the Emergency Department in 2012 with what he thought was an appendicitis attack.

Instead, he was diagnosed with stage III colon cancer. Following six months of chemotherapy at The University of Kansas Cancer Center, he is on the road to full recovery.

Yet his story doesn’t end there. Farmer decided to participate in a clinical trial – research studies that give patients access to potentially effective treatments not available elsewhere. The trials also can identify safer and more effective approaches to prevention, screening and diagnosis, and they can contribute to research that may help others – which is what attracted Farmer.

“If doctors could learn from me and help lessen someone else’s treatment time,” he said, “that would be terrific!”

Physicians and researchers are eager to find more people like Farmer to enroll in trials. Patients are enrolled at our cancer center’s Westwood and community locations, and at the KU Clinical Research Center in Fairway.

“Through clinical trial participation, patients make a valuable contribution to medical knowledge by improving overall cancer care and helping future patients battle the disease,” said Kirsten Erickson, PhD, senior executive director in Clinical Trials Shared Resources.

More than 250 cancer trials are underway at the cancer center, with more opening regularly. Approximately 1,000 patients participate in the trials, which cover almost every major type and stage of cancer. Every new cancer patient can be considered.

Erickson noted all trials at the cancer center follow FDA guidelines and are reviewed by multiple independent committees before patients are enrolled.

To learn more about clinical trials available at the cancer center, go to kucancercenter.org/cancer-clinical-trials or call 913-588-1227.

By the Numbers: Certified Nurses

In addition to being RNs, certified nurses receive extra training in specialized areas of care, reflecting their expert knowledge in those areas.

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<th>Year</th>
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Certifications held

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Top 5 certifications

- Critical Care: 186
- Progressive Care: 79
- Oncology: 92
- Medical Surgical: 49
- Operating Room: 31

To suggest a By the Numbers, email Advances@kumc.edu.
**Events**

- **Blood drive** – The Community Blood Center’s monthly blood drive at the main campus is 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Thursday, March 26, in the Student Center’s Francisco Lounge. Walk-ins are welcome.

- **Stress and aging** – Our ability to deal with stress often diminishes as we age. And dealing with a lifetime of stress can accelerate the traits of aging. Explore the science behind the relationship between stress and aging. The session is 2-3:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 31, at Turning Point: The Center for Hope and Healing in Leawood. Call 913-574-0900 to register.

- **Neurological disease’s emotional side** – Every day can be a challenge for those with Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis or other neurological disease – as well as for families and friends. Learn practical skills to manage ups and downs experienced by those whose lives have been touched by these conditions. The session is 3-5 p.m. Wednesday, April 8, at Turning Point: The Center for Hope and Healing in Leawood. Call 913-574-0900 to register.

- **Evening of beauty** – Physicians and aestheticians will discuss a range of aesthetic services, including rhinoplasty, face-lift, blepharoplasty, otoplasty, Botox, Perlane, Restylane, Juvederm, Sculptra and Voluma. The class is 6-8 p.m. Thursday, April 9, at KU MedWest in Shawnee. Register at 913-588-1227 or kumed.com/beauty.

**PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT**

**RTs: Helping patients breathe easier**

In theory, respiratory therapists have it made: They help patients breathe, which everyone already knows how to do.

But in reality, RTs’ responsibilities are so critical to patient care, so complex and varied, these highly skilled therapists are lucky to catch their own breath. The University of Kansas Hospital’s Respiratory Therapy Services team – 130 RTs and 10 support staff – works around the clock caring for, treating and educating more than 250 patients daily.

Last year they managed 10,500 days of life support for the most critically ill patients. They also performed nearly 600 rapid extubations: To get patients off ventilators sooner, an RT can remove the ventilator tube once the patient’s condition meets the physician’s criteria. This aids in quicker recovery, helps prevent ventilator-assisted pneumonia and shortens length of stay.

RTs are vital members of the hospital’s intensive care, progressive care, Emergency Department and clinic teams. They also are essential to the Code Blue, Rapid Response (including Pediatric) and Trauma teams.

Among the procedures they handle:

- Clear airways of patients who have stopped breathing
- Provide one-on-one bedside care for critically ill patients
- Assist with neonatal resuscitation
- Treat patients with cardiopulmonary ailments
- Educate patients with breathing disorders such as asthma, cystic fibrosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Help diagnose respiratory diseases
- Manage oxygen delivery systems and mechanical ventilators (life support systems)
- Administer aerosol medications
- Provide pre-discharge safety checks for home oxygen users
- Work with teams across the hospital to improve efficiency, quality and safety

“Our respiratory therapists are very proud of the roles they play in achieving our hospital’s high national rankings,” said department Director Dan Conyers, RRT. “And that’s not only for Pulmonary, but our other ranked specialties as well, because RTs partner on most of those teams.”

**EXPOSURE**

**Milestone for new ‘tower’**

The University of Kansas Hospital’s largest philanthropic project to date – the $280 million Cambridge North Tower (kumed.com/cambridge-north) – officially broke ground March 9. Nearly 20 people provided the ceremonial shoveling honors, including hospital executives, physicians, community leaders and philanthropists. The 92-bed facility is expected to open in 2017.
In the News
A recap of recent articles, TV segments and other media coverage of the region’s leading academic medical center

► Supporting Medicaid – KHI News Service, March 18, Robert Moser, MD, executive director of The University of Kansas Hospital’s Kansas Heart and Stroke Collaborative, last week headlined a long list of proponents asking state legislators to expand Medicaid. “Expansion is critical for Kansas. Our providers need it. Our people need it,” said Moser, who was secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment before joining our hospital in December.

► Urgent care convenience downtown – KMBC-TV, March 16. For the growing number of people who live and work downtown, The University of Kansas Hospital’s new urgent care clinic at Sprint Center (story at right) is a convenient alternative to a hospital visit. A trip to the new clinic “is something they can do on their lunch hour or during a break,” said Lee Norman, MD, chief medical officer.

► The rise of deadly viruses – The Kansas City Star, March 14. The mysterious new “Bourbon virus,” which claimed the life of a Kansas man, is just the latest virus grabbing headlines. Dana Hawkins, MD, infectious disease specialist at the University of Kansas Medical Center, and other experts explain how increasing numbers of world travelers contribute to the viruses’ spread.

► Hospital’s opportunities and challenges – The Kansas City Business Journal, March 13. As The University of Kansas Hospital broke ground on Cambridge North Tower, the journal noted the hospital’s shift in 1998 into an independent public authority “has resulted in a cutting-edge hospital, as evidenced by perennial high national ranks for clinical care and patient satisfaction … But it also has meant no more state tax dollars,” requiring more philanthropic support.

► Young cancer survivor hopes her experience saves lives – KCTV-5, March 12. The story of Ashley Havlena, a 27-year-old survivor of colorectal cancer, is at the center of The University of Kansas Cancer Center’s new colorectal cancer awareness campaign, and she’s helping attract widespread attention about the importance of screening. Havlena and James Coster, MD, at The University of Kansas Cancer Center-Overland Park, discussed symptoms and her battle with the disease.

Exploring healthcare careers
Local high schools students are participating in a new Explorer Post (exploringkcmo.org) at our academic medical center. Students spend several hours each month meeting caregivers and touring areas such as rehabilitation, orthopedics and the burn center. On March 4, Wyandotte High School students met with nurses, including Meredith Bell, APRN (right), a doctorate student at the University of Kansas School of Nursing, who showed them how to operate a blood pressure-monitoring device.

Sprint Center’s new tenant: urgent care
The University of Kansas Hospital has opened an urgent care clinic inside Sprint Center, the first such urgent care facility within Kansas City’s downtown freeway loop.

The clinic, which debuted March 16, serves the city’s thriving downtown population – more than 21,000 residents and thousands more who work there.

The clinic is inside Sprint Center’s Grand Lobby, next to the College Basketball Experience. Hours are 10 a.m.-6:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; more hours or days will be considered. Staff treat patients older than 6 months for a variety of minor illnesses and injuries.

“We’ve been part of Sprint Center since it opened in 2007, including our current role taking care of athletes and fans at its sporting events,” said Bob Page, hospital president and CEO.

“With Sprint Center as the catalyst, we see people from all over the metro flocking downtown to live, work and play. They deserve access to basic healthcare close to their jobs and their homes.

“We are proud to be part of the renaissance of downtown Kansas City,” he added, noting the hospital’s longtime relationship with AEG, Sprint Center operators. As a part of Sprint Center since its beginning, “we now are expanding this role to serve the people it has helped bring downtown. This is part of our commitment to the entire metropolitan area.”

Graduate programs among nation’s best
Graduate programs at the University of Kansas Medical Center again received high marks in the 2016 edition of U.S. News & World Report’s “Best Graduate Schools.”

Among public universities, the medical center placed 10 programs in the top 50 in the nation. Notably, the School of Health Professions has four programs in the top 10, Nursing rose four spots to enter the top 20, and Family Medicine – an area of focus for the medical center, given the state’s shortage of physicians – rose to 13th overall (including private universities) and kept its 12th place ranking among public universities.

Here are the rankings and the schools they are part of:
1. Occupational Therapy (Master/Doctorate), School of Health Professions
2. Speech-Language-Pathology (Master), School of Health Professions
3. Audiology (Doctorate), School of Health Professions
4. Physical Therapy (Master/Doctorate), School of Health Professions
5. Medicine-Family Medicine, School of Medicine
6. Online Nursing (Master), School of Nursing
7. Medicine-Primary Care, School of Medicine
8. Nursing (Master), School of Nursing
9. Healthcare Policy and Management (Master), School of Medicine
10. Medicine-Research (MD/PhD), School of Medicine
Early efforts by Tricia Rasmussen, RN, were instrumental in development of the Nutrition Rehabilitation Center in Nkwanta.

Our People

Better nutrition in Ghana – Impoverished residents of the Volta Region, an area in Africa along the eastern edge of Ghana, now have a brighter and healthier future, thanks in part to Tricia Rasmussen, RN. Before she became coordinator at The University of Kansas Cancer Center’s Blood and Marrow Transplant program, Rasmussen served 27 months as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana, where she witnessed the area’s struggles with malnutrition. A fourth of the children are stunted and 80 percent are anemic.

In 2012 she submitted a request to the U.S. Department of Defense for $640,000 in funding to help build a Nutrition Rehabilitation Center in the town of Nkwanta, a small town in Volta. The funding was approved just as Rasmussen finished her Peace Corps service, and construction began in fall 2013.

This January, the facility held its official inauguration. It is the only nutrition rehabilitation facility in the country, according to the U.S. Embassy in Ghana.

The embassy’s announcement called the center “a hub of hope” and credited its beginnings to “a grassroots development initiative of a Peace Corps volunteer … to bring the vision to life.”

For Rasmussen, who joined our cancer center November 2012, word of the center’s opening brought a sense of optimism after years of work. “It’s a huge accomplishment, thanks to many,” she said. “I’m so thrilled at the opportunities the center will have for young children and their families to overcome malnutrition.”

Our ‘Heroes in Healthcare’ – Two nurses at The University of Kansas Hospital are named “Heroes in Healthcare,” an annual Ingram’s magazine salute recognizing “the best of what the greater Kansas City region has to offer in its healthcare providers.”

Kim Dixon, RN, director of our hospital’s Marc A. Asher, MD, Comprehensive Spine Center, emphasizes the importance of teamwork among all disciplines of healthcare providers.

In her leadership role at the spine center, she can continue a career-long love for creating new service lines and patient care areas. “The joy in my day-to-day work,” she told the magazine, “comes about by bringing the teams together to collaborate and design high-quality patient care services and seeing the teams’ ideas put into actions.”

Lori Ranallo, APRN, previously worked in financial regulation, but she changed careers nearly 20 years ago after watching nurses care for her father, who was dying from lung cancer.

“Those experiences forever changed my life,” said Ranallo, now part of the hospital’s breast cancer survivorship program at the Westwood Campus. “I knew that I would work with cancer patients – it was my calling. I know that if I touch one person’s life, the way the nurses caring for my father touched me, then I have truly made a difference.”

Fellow in anatomical sciences – Robert Klein, PhD, vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean of graduate studies at the University of Kansas Medical Center, has been named a Fellow of the American Association of Anatomists. He will be inducted at the end of this month.

The distinction honors members who have demonstrated excellence in science and in their overall contributions to the anatomical sciences.

Klein has dedicated much of his career to teaching and mentoring graduate students, medical students and junior faculty. He has been honored with numerous awards during his long academic career.