



Advancing Cincinnati's Cancer Care: The Urology Group

Aligning the mission, vision and purpose of more than a handful of professionals sounds like a difficult task. However, at Cincinnati's own The Urology Group, more than 30 physicians have merged their practices and goals to align under a single organization with a single vision: to provide the most advanced urologic care to improve the lives of patients.

In 1996, nine urology practices in Cincinnati came together to form The Urology Group. At the time, the group was the largest of its kind in the nation and offered a diverse set of services to patients, including a state-of-the-art surgery center, outpatient procedures, cancer care, pathology and access to >



Group, however, patients are screened and carefully referred to those doctors who are best prepared to handle that individual's condition. The more patients physicians see with similar conditions, the more expertise and knowledge the doctors gain on that specific condition.

"Each doctor is empowered to become a better doctor and expert at his or her particular line of care," Dr. Buffington said.

clinical trials. The group's model was a success in the region and sparked a wave of similar mergers throughout the country. The Urology Group, which is headquartered in Norwood, currently employs 38 practicing physicians and operates 12 locations across Greater Cincinnati, keeping it one of the top-ten largest urology groups in the nation.

"One of the greatest benefits of being a large organization is that we can provide highly specialized care to our patients," said Chief Medical Officer Dr. Philip Buffington, one of the founding members of The Urology Group. "Many of our doctors are the most-practiced physicians of their kind in the country."

Dr. Buffington, a native Cincinnati and 1984 graduate of the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, began his medical career at The Jewish Hospital and received his surgical and urology training at the University of Cincinnati. In 1991, he started his own practice with five other urologists, which he later merged with eight other practices to form The Urology Group. For the past six years, he has served as the group's CMO, running the clinical operations of the group, which includes the surgery center, imaging center and bladder control center, among others.

Each of the physicians is trained to handle most of the needs of the patients that come to The Urology

Dr. Buffington sees this level of expertise as a huge advantage to patients and their families. For example, in the area of prostate cancer, at least five new drugs have been introduced to the medical field in the past five years. However, with each new drug comes new regulations, and maintaining proper knowledge about all of the medical research and information for every new drug is a very complicated process.

"As an individual practitioner, it would be very difficult to keep up with the best practices of every new drug," Dr. Buffington said.

However, at The Urology Group, at least five doctors have become experts at the prescription and use of advanced prostate cancer drugs. For patients, the benefit is enormous: it enables them to not only have direct access to the medications, but also access to doctors who are regularly monitoring and balancing the use of those medications with other methods of treatment. Similarly, because The Urology Group pools its resources and expertise, the organization is able to afford high-end technology that would be cost-prohibitive at an independent practice. One such technology is the CyberKnife® stereotactic body radiation therapy (SBRT) system, the cutting-edge radiation delivery machine that enables doctors to deliver high doses of radiation with extreme accuracy in fewer visits. The Urology Group is the only practice in the region that offers this technology

specifically for prostate cancer treatment—drawing patients from hospital networks across the Midwest.

“CyberKnife can deliver highly targeted, high-dosage radiation directly to the prostate,” Dr. Buffington said. “It cuts patient visits from 40 down to only five visits, which can be completed in five days.”

CyberKnife treatments are run by doctors from Oncology Hematology Care (OHC), one of Cincinnati’s leading cancer care providers, at The Urology Group’s Norwood facility. In

addition to operating CyberKnife, OHC oncologists partner with The Urology Group in a monthly meeting to discuss advanced and complicated cancers.

“It’s an invaluable resource to have some of the best doctors in the city in the room to discuss our complicated cases,” Dr. Buffington said. “It is enormously beneficial to be able to share ideas, potential treatment plans and patient options with leading experts. It’s incredible for us as doctors, but it’s incredible for our patients, too.”

The Urology Group specializes in the treatment of four types of cancer: prostate, kidney, bladder, and testicular. The group has several best-in-practice doctors on its team, including a designated pathologist, Dr. Cynthia Westermann, who serves as the head of the pathology lab and is one of fewer than 100 pathologists across the nation to earn certification in prostate pathology. The Urology Group has the only lab in the region that is dedicated to urologic and prostate tissue analysis and biopsies, and more than 2,500 biopsies are performed on-site each year.

In the near future, The Urology Group is opening its doors to OHC oncologist Dr. David Waterhouse, who will see patients at The Urology Center once a week. The addition of Dr. Waterhouse only adds to the full-scale service The Urology Group

provides its patients in a multidisciplinary setting, including medical oncologists, surgical oncologists, urologists, and more.

One critically important offering at The Urology Group is clinical research, which Dr. Buffington oversees. The organization runs phase three clinical trials in its



clinical research department, which are trials that have been tested in small groups of human patients and have been evaluated for safety, effectiveness and side effects. The Urology Group physicians can quickly identify individuals who would qualify to participate in ongoing medical research — which typically means the pharmaceutical company will cover the cost of the needed medications. But outside of the saved expense, The Urology Group is able to advance the pool of knowledge and create new understanding and treatments for patients.

For Cincinnatians, the complexity and comprehensiveness of the services provided by The Urology Group answers a growing need: prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in men. But with The Urology Group in their backyard, Cincinnati residents are standing shoulder-to-shoulder with leading experts and national-level resources.

“We are working hard to be an incredible source of information and technology for Cincinnati,” Dr. Buffington said. “And the future is going to be amazing.”

