



News Release

Contact: Amy Blaser, Vice President

Phone: (402) 562-3371

Email: aebblaser@columbushosp.org

Date: January 26, 2021

Columbus Cancer Care: Providing needed services to our community

For Immediate Release

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – A decade ago, Dr. Joan Keit took a “huge leap of faith” and started a cancer center in Columbus.

She made the decision to start the clinic while she was practicing radiation oncology in Omaha.

She was seeing people from Columbus and the surrounding area come in for treatment because there were no radiation services for people with cancer available in Platte County.

“They would travel an hour-and-a-half each way to get what amounts to a 5-minute radiation treatment,” Keit said.

Considering most patients have to receive radiation treatments for several days over a period of weeks, it would add up to a lot of time on the road.

“That’s hard on patients,” Keit said. “Some people would not want to get treated because they didn’t want to be a burden on their family or didn’t have access to transportation.”

Keit knew there was a need for people in Platte County to have radiation oncology close to home so, in 2011, she opened Columbus Cancer Care at 3764 39th Ave.

Even though starting her own center for the first time was a risk, it has proven to be the right choice. Since it opened, about 1,000 cancer patients have been seen at the center.

“I still have patients tell me today that they are so thankful that we are here because that means they don’t have to travel for treatment,” Keit said.

The center provides treatment for a variety of adult cancers. The most common are breast, prostate, lung, colorectal and lymphoma.

A spectrum of therapies is offered using a linear accelerator machine that generates radiation.



“We can do the most simple treatments for simple problems up to the most technically advanced treatment plan,” Keit said.

Therapies include stereotactic, which uses a pencil-thin beam of radiation to treat small tumors in high doses; intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT), which is an advanced way to deliver a beam of radiation to cancer cells; and radiopharmaceutical, which is administering radioactive drugs for certain types of cancer.

Shortly after the center opened, Keit noticed that there were few cancer support services in Platte County and the surrounding area.

“I didn’t realize how varied the needs were. I was really focused on the radiation-technical part when I started,” she said.

Since then, the Columbus Cancer CARE Foundation was established to provide needed education and support programs to patients and their families. Those programs include free transportation for cancer patients to improve access to care, gas cards, hotel stays at Days Inn, custom wigs, lift chairs, a cancer buddy program and a resource room with educational and other materials.

The center has also worked closely with Columbus Community Hospital to provide a cancer support group and cancer screenings.

“I’m always talking about screening and early detection. A lot of these cancers, if not completely preventable, are treatable if caught early. It is really devastating when you find something that should have been caught and wasn’t,” Keit said.

She knows because she has had family members die from cancer that could have been treated if it had been found earlier. Having a family history of cancer is what led Keit to pursue a career in oncology and she tries to treat all of her patients as if they were family.

The center has a staff of five employees. The team helps provide cancer services that are comparable or better than what can be found in bigger communities.

“Any radiation oncology you can get in Omaha or Lincoln, you can get here. For a small town, we have a lot to offer,” Keit said.

She is proud that, since the center opened, it has been recognized for its level of care several times. For the last three years, the center has placed in the top 1% of radiation oncology practices in the country by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.



In the next five to 10 years, Keit said cancer treatment will continue to grow in Platte County by integrating radiation and medical oncology.

“From a cancer treatment standpoint, I hope we can get further along in what we call personalized medicine so we will be able to identify which patients need more treatment or less treatment and how we can get more specific for particular cancers,” she said. “I would also like to see a multidisciplinary cancer program for Columbus where we have a robust tumor board and can start clinical trials. We have the pieces. We just need to bring it together.”

###