Welcome to Oncology Update

Earlier this year, Health Quest and Western Connecticut Health Network combined to become Nuvance Health, allowing us to expand our range of services and ability to deliver comprehensive, state-of-the-art cancer care to a wider range of patients.

When raising the bar for patient care, expertise and education go hand-in-hand. Strong education programs are required to create and expand our capabilities in fields such as breast cancer and thoracic surgery.

The relationship between expertise and education is one that Health Quest, now part of Nuvance Health, understands and embraces. We are focused on leading internal and external medical education initiatives, building new programs and expanding our service lines to better accommodate the needs of patients right here in our community.

Thanks to the recruitment of talented physicians who have extensive track records in clinical research, and presence on regional and national platforms, we can host more educational events, such as Oncology Teaching Day this winter. These events will not only bolster the knowledge and expertise of our internal staff, but also expand learning opportunities to healthcare professionals and students outside of our healthcare system. Next year, our teams will also host smaller, disease-specific events and encourage more providers to present patient cases at our weekly tumor boards.

Some of the distinguished medical leaders to recently join us include Susan K. Boolbol, MD, FACS, and Rodrigo Erlich, MD, who will lend their years of experience treating cancer to the community, and Faiz Bhora, MD, FACS, who brings groundbreaking research to our region.

Our Graduate Medical Education (GME) program is another key component in our commitment to education. Vassar Brothers Medical Center welcomed its first residents this year, and we now have residents practicing in internal medicine, family medicine and surgery programs throughout our system. Our GME program will provide us with ambassadors — both locally and nationally — who will serve as shining examples of our dedication to quality care.

Please reach out to me at (845) 483-6920 to discuss learning opportunities at Health Quest or to discuss referrals to our surgical oncology program.

TTY/Accessibility: (800) 421-1220
A career in medicine was not always on the agenda for Dr. Boolbol, but a critical change in course led the physician down a life-altering path.

“I grew up always thinking and saying I would be a doctor, but when it was time to go to college, I questioned my choice,” said Dr. Boolbol, who studied and worked in finance before making the decision to listen to her instincts. “I realized I really did want to go to medical school, so I left a career on Wall Street to follow my personal dream.”

Years later, Dr. Boolbol’s decision proved to be the right one for the board-certified, fellowship-trained breast surgeon, who brings her wealth of experience to the mid-Hudson Valley.

“I do not know if Dr. Boolbol realizes what a giant she is in medicine,” said Carinne Anderson, MD, breast surgical oncologist new to Health Quest in December. “She attended one of the first dedicated breast fellowships in the country at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, trained countless fellows in breast surgery at Beth Israel Medical Center and has authored more than 35 peer-reviewed publications. She is truly a leader in the breast surgical oncology field.”

Bringing enhanced attention to breast care

Trained to offer solutions and hope to patients living with breast cancer, Dr. Boolbol stays focused on wellness as she addresses disease, and she is thrilled to be surrounded by a like-minded team.

“We care for women on the entire spectrum of breast health issues, from benign tumor to breast cancer and everything in between,” Dr. Boolbol said. “We have advanced, state-of-the-art facilities, offer sophisticated breast imaging services and collaborate with an incredible team that includes medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, plastic surgeons, nurse navigators and genetic counselors. Together, we cover our patients’ full scope of needs from screening through survivorship.”

A preventive approach

To help women gain a better understanding of their personal health and risk for breast abnormalities and cancers, genetic counselors at the Dyson Breast Center conduct important screenings to detect hereditary factors that increase the likelihood of disease, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations.

“Finding a mutation allows us to offer the appropriate screenings, which may be different from what we might recommend for a woman without those markers for breast cancer. This is also when we may offer prophylactic surgery,” Dr. Boolbol said. “The fact that the Dyson Breast Center, part of Nuvance Health, has a number of genetic counselors available to oversee these services is unusual and very special. It highlights the commitment the health system has to taking care of breast cancer patients, and those who are at increased risk.”

Sara Winterleitner, NP-BC, adult nurse practitioner specializing in oncology, encourages women to stay informed about personal health by having the appropriate genetic tests and follow-up conversations with healthcare providers.

“Knowledge is power, and genetic testing and counseling can be important tools to decrease the fear surrounding the unknown,” Winterleitner said. “If a physician, such as a primary care provider, has a question about a patient’s genetic risk, he or she should send the patient to a genetic counselor.”

Individuals with first-degree relatives who have been diagnosed with cancer are good candidates for genetic testing and counseling, as are people in other high-risk groups, such as those who have a personal history of cancer themselves or people who are members of certain ethnic groups with increased inherited cancer susceptibility, such as Ashkenazi Jewish heritage.

“As a physician assistant working in breast surgery, I see many patients with a history of breast cancer and/or a family history of breast cancer, who are at elevated risk,”
said Alexa Kyle, PA-C, physician assistant with the Dyson Breast Center at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. "If genetic testing comes back negative for cancer, it can provide great relief and peace of mind. If it is positive, our highly specialized genetic counselors can provide guidance to these patients about breast surveillance and risk reduction choices to optimize the patient’s breast health in the future."

**An array of treatment options**

In the event of a breast cancer diagnosis, patients can expect to receive care from a multidisciplinary team dedicated to a holistic approach to treatment.

"Patients are followed by members of three specialties — surgical oncology, radiation oncology and medical oncology — who provide critical support in managing the disease," said Radhika Rachamalla, MD, breast cancer medical oncologist and hematologist with Health Quest Medical Practice, part of Nuvance Health. "We work in close collaboration, as treatments have evolved to integrate all three modalities into patient care to improve outcomes and cosmetic results. Patients can feel good knowing that we are working together to produce the best outcomes."

Dr. Rachamalla notes that breast surgery, such as lumpectomy or mastectomy, is sometimes the solution that will yield the best result for a patient, adding that Dr. Boolbol has deep expertise in surgeries that preserve the breast to the greatest possible extent.

"We are always looking for ways to improve outcomes and preserve breast tissue," Dr. Rachamalla said. "I am looking forward to collaborating with Dr. Boolbol and crafting treatment plans that will help patients get the least amount of surgery and experience reduced emotional and physical disruption."

Specifically, Dr. Boolbol specializes in oncoplastic surgery, which is designed to maintain the original shape and contour of the breast by carefully rearranging the tissue after lumpectomy.

"It is important to referring physicians that they remain in the loop, and we also believe that is an integral part of each patient’s treatment process, so we stay in communication with primary care providers."

— Susan K. Boolbol, MD, FACS, chief of breast surgery, Dyson Breast Center at Vassar Brothers Medical Center
"If a woman is unhappy with the appearance of her breasts post-treatment, it affects every aspect of life. If we can enhance the aesthetic outcome after breast surgery, we can help each patient tremendously and help her emotionally overcome the fact that she has had breast cancer," said Dr. Boolbol, who teaches this type of procedure to surgeons throughout the country. "This approach to surgery makes the Dyson Breast Center stand out from similar providers in our region. It makes a difference for patients physically as well as emotionally, aligning with our goal to treat the whole person, not just the disease."

Complementing Dr. Boolbol's innovative approach to surgery is the breast program's participation in clinical trials, offering patients access to medications and treatments that may not otherwise be available.

"We are already participating in a broad number of trials, and we plan to increase our involvement in research," Dr. Boolbol said. "Every advancement that has been made in cancer care would not be possible without these trials."

Guidance every step of the way

Nurse navigators at the Dyson Breast Center help patients manage the process of treatment after a cancer diagnosis.

"When you have so many moving parts within a care plan, the patient can get lost," Dr. Boolbol said. "A nurse navigator will take a patient's hand and lead her through the care journey."

Whether a patient needs help scheduling appointments, learning more about financial resources or connecting with spiritual support, a nurse navigator can provide guidance that continues through and after the treatment process.

"The support and healthcare we offer does not end with active treatment," Dr. Boolbol said. "Our patients go into a survivorship care plan that includes follow-up care, such as regular breast imaging and emotional support."

“I am proud to work with doctors like Dr. Boolbol who share the goal of providing our patients with compassionate, well-rounded, complete care that addresses their physical, emotional, financial and spiritual needs. We make a great team.” — Radhika Rachamalla, MD, breast cancer medical oncologist and hematologist with Health Quest Medical Practice, P.C., now part of Nuvance Health
Meet Susan K. Boolbol, MD, FACS

An esteemed surgeon who has been named one of the Top Doctors by *New York Magazine* on multiple occasions, Dr. Boolbol brings impressive credentials and expertise in the treatment of breast cancer. She joins us from Mount Sinai Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, where she practiced for 18 years, the last 11 as Chief of Breast Surgery. Dr. Boolbol’s educational background includes:

- MD: George Washington University School of Medicine
- Residency in general surgery: NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center
- Fellowship in breast surgery: Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Dr. Boolbol was also named Mother of the Year by the American Cancer Society in 2017. Her daughters, Emma and Mackenzie, presented the award at an ACS luncheon held at the St. Regis New York hotel, detailing their mother’s commitment to her family and her patients.

To learn more about Dr. Boolbol and the Dyson Breast Center at Vassar Brothers Medical Center, visit [nuvancehealth.org/dysonbreastcenter](http://nuvancehealth.org/dysonbreastcenter) or call *(845) 214-1840.*

TTY/Accessibility: *(800) 421-1220*
Welcome, Dr. Erlich!

The Dyson Center for Cancer Care welcomes Rodrigo Erlich, MD, as the new director of medical oncology and hematology. Dr. Erlich joins us at Health Quest Medical Practice, part of Nuvance Health, from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where he served as a professor of oncology.

“This is a fantastic opportunity to build a program and provide teaching to residents and medical students while also expanding clinical trials,” Dr. Erlich said. “The goal is to advance our oncology program and provide patients the care they need close to home.”

Dr. Erlich will focus on developing multidisciplinary specialty clinics where patients may be seen by surgeons, medical oncologists and radiation oncologists specializing in different types of cancer, including breast, melanoma and head and neck. He looks forward to working with physicians who are leaders in their respective fields, such as Dr. Boolbol.

“Dr. Boolbol is a very knowledgeable breast specialist and has terrific ratings from patients,” Dr. Erlich said. “She is a great addition to this program.”

Dr. Erlich earned his medical degree at the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Santa Casa de São Paulo in Brazil. He completed his residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in medical oncology at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Nuvance Health: A relentless pursuit to redefine care

Health Quest and Western Connecticut Health Network have come together to offer even more patients access to exceptional care.

Health Quest and Western Connecticut Health Network have joined forces to form a nonprofit health system known as Nuvance Health (pronounced NEW-ponce) – a name derived from the words “new” and “advance.” The new system is led by CEO John Murphy, MD, and President, Robert Friedberg.

This combination will help deliver personalized, comprehensive and progressive healthcare to approximately 1.5 million residents across New York’s Hudson Valley and western Connecticut. The system includes seven hospitals: Danbury Hospital, New Milford Hospital, Northern Dutchess Hospital, Norwalk Hospital, Putnam Hospital Center, Sharon Hospital and Vassar Brothers Medical Center, as well as more than 2,600 physicians on the medical staff.

For more information on Nuvance Health, visit nuvancehealth.org
Moving for Life

Dance toward recovery after breast cancer treatment.

Moving for Life classes are held in the Wellness Center at Northern Dutchess Hospital every Wednesday from 4 to 5 pm, and provide cancer patients and survivors with an opportunity to get active in an engaging, fun and supportive environment.

“The class is designed to progress from an easy, mindful self-assessment of one’s current physical fitness to challenges of balance, flexibility, strength, stamina and complexity,” said Joseph Mills, EdD, NASM-CPT, CMA, RSME, movement analyst, personal fitness educator and group instructor for Moving for Life. “We work to safely raise the heart rate and encourage students to develop a sense of their own thresholds and limitations while challenging them with different movement patterns and tempos.”

For more information on Moving for Life, call the Wellness Center at (845) 871-4300.
TTY/Accessibility: (800) 421-1220
Advanced Airway Program

Breathe easy

Our Advanced Airway Program offers state-of-the-art care for patients with complex airway conditions.

Health Quest Medical Practice, now part of Nuvance Health, recently began the Advanced Airway Program to help treat patients with a variety of complex airway conditions, including tracheal, bronchial and subglottic stenosis; granulomatosis with polyangiitis; benign and malignant tumors of the lung and airway; and scarring from tracheostomy tubes and prolonged intubation.

“The goal — above all — is to help patients breathe better,” said Faiz Bhora, MD, FACS, chief of thoracic surgery at Health Quest Medical Practice (HQMP), now part of Nuvance Health. “We offer our patients access to the most advanced technology and aim to treat them in the most minimally invasive means possible. Common procedures, for example, include balloon dilation, spray cryotherapy and the use of stents to keep the airway open and unobstructed.”

In cases where open surgery is recommended, Dr. Bhora collaborates with Al Haitham Al Shetawi, MD, DMD, a fellowship-trained head and neck surgeon with HQMP, to manage patients.

“I believe we have shifted the paradigm from relying on an open approach — one where the neck has to be opened up and patients have to stay in the hospital for a week — to truly taking advantage of the value of endoscopic procedures, which have excellent outcomes, typically take less than an hour to complete and only require a one-night hospital stay.”

— Faiz Bhora, MD, FACS, chief of thoracic surgery at Health Quest Medical Practice, part of Nuvance Health

“Together, Dr. Al Shetawi and I bring our collective experience and expertise to these complex cases,” Dr. Bhora said. “This allows us to provide optimal care for everything from the vocal cords to the lungs.”

A history of landmark research

Patients of the Advanced Airway Program benefit from the translational research conducted by Dr. Bhora and his team. For instance, they are currently working to develop a way of reconstructing the trachea using 3D printing and bioengineered grafts made from biocompatible materials, extracellular membrane and stem cells. Their findings have been presented at several national and international thoracic surgery forums and cited in a number of peer-reviewed publications.

Dr. Bhora was also the lead researcher behind the 2016 landmark study published in JAMA Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery on the treatment of benign tracheal stenosis using endoluminal spray cryotherapy, as well as a contributing researcher to the 2010 study in The Annals of Thoracic Surgery that found timely airway stenting improved survival rates in patients with central airway obstructions due to cancer.

“We have the ability to treat patients with complex health concerns right here in the Hudson Valley,” Dr. Bhora said. “Additionally, we will continue to expand our knowledge of the airway through our continued research in the laboratory.”

The Advanced Airway Program is located in the Dyson Center for Cancer Care at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. For more information, call (845) 483-6920. TTY/Accessibility: (800) 421-1220
Lung Screenings

Enhancing lung cancer outcomes through early detection

Lung cancer screening trials at Vassar Brothers Medical Center find the disease in its earliest stages.

Historically, lung cancer has been a disease found during its advanced stages, with limited treatment options for physicians to offer patients. Advanced technologies, however, have shifted the narrative, detecting the disease during the critical period of time when treatment may prove most effective.

“When we find a stage one cancer, we have more options to offer the patient in terms of surgery, and the overall prognosis and survival are much better compared to when we find a late-stage cancer,” said Joanne Sun, MD, thoracic surgeon at Health Quest Medical Practice (HQMP), part of Nuvance Health. “Five-year overall survival for early-stage lung cancer is on the scale of 80% to 90% compared to 15% to 25% for advanced-stage lung cancer.”

To further explore the impact of early treatment, HQMP participates in clinical research trials, including the I-ELCAP trial. Available to patients older than age 55 with more than a 30 pack-year smoking history, the trial offers low-dose CT lung cancer screening to detect abnormalities in the lung tissue.

Additionally, HQMP participates in the IELCART trial to gain more clinical knowledge about the treatment of early-stage lung cancer.

“IELCART gives us more information about options, such as limited resection, watchful waiting and radiotherapy,” Dr. Sun said. “The data we obtain from these trials can help improve patient care in the long term.”

To learn more about eligibility for lung cancer screening trials, patients may call (844) 224-LUNG (5864).

TTY/Accessibility: (800) 421-1220

Meet Faiz Bhora, MD, FACS

Faiz Bhora, MD, FACS, is chief of thoracic surgery at Health Quest Medical Practice (HQMP), part of Nuvance Health.

After earning his medical degree in 1992 from The Aga Khan University in Pakistan, Dr. Bhora moved to the U.S. and completed his general surgery training at George Washington University Medical Center in 2000. He then completed a residency in cardiothoracic surgery at the University of California Los Angeles Medical Center in 2002 and a fellowship in thoracic oncology surgery at the University of Pennsylvania in 2005.

Dr. Bhora is a member of numerous professional and scientific societies, including the American Thoracic Society, the American College of Surgeons, the American College of Chest Physicians and the Eastern Cardiothoracic Surgical Society, for which he serves as president. He was recently nominated by his peers as a Castle Connolly “Top Doc” in Hudson Valley magazine (2019).
Specialty Focus

Specialized gynecologic oncology care

The gynecologic oncology program offers patients access to an experienced team of providers, advanced robotic technology and groundbreaking clinical trials.

Based at the Dyson Center for Cancer Care, the Health Quest Medical Practice (HQMP) gynecologic oncology program helps care for patients at risk for or diagnosed with gynecological cancer, including ovarian, cervical, uterine, vaginal and vulvar cancer, and other benign gynecological conditions.

The program offers surgical intervention, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, palliative care, complementary medicine and support from other specialists. It is also considered to be one of the national leaders in robotic hysterectomy—a procedure carried out with the assistance of the da Vinci® Surgical System.

“We began offering robotic hysterectomies in 2005 and have since performed thousands of these procedures,” said Heidi Godoy, DO, HQMP gynecologic oncologist. “With the exception of surgical intervention for cervical cancer [for which open hysterectomy is still preferred], these robotic procedures have equivalent oncological outcomes when compared to open procedures, and they result in less pain, fewer postoperative infections and significantly less recovery time. In fact, it has become the mainstay of surgical intervention for endometrial cancer.”

In addition to housing two da Vinci® robots, the gynecologic oncology program is led by a skilled team of gynecologic oncology specialists.

“The team includes five board-certified gynecologic oncologists who have trained at large centers and can provide excellent cancer care locally,” said Patrick F. Timmins, MD, an HQMP gynecologic oncologist on the medical staff at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. “Patients often assume that because this is a semi-rural area, they would be better off seeking care in a bigger city. However, that is not the case. The Dyson Center for Cancer Care offers leading-edge care to patients in the mid-Hudson Valley.”

The role of clinical trials

The gynecologic oncology program has paired with both the pharmaceutical industry and NRG Oncology, a nonprofit research organization, to offer patients access to new clinical trials aimed at providing better treatments for primary and recurrent cancers.

Dr. Godoy, for instance, is a principal investigator for a clinical trial that is testing the use of immunotherapy in combination with standard chemotherapy to treat recurrent ovarian cancer.

She noted, “While the goal is always to get the patient into remission, a primary objective of this trial—and many clinical trials focused on cancers that are more difficult to treat—is to improve patients’ quality of life.”

Dr. Timmins agreed.

“Each clinical trial is another parcel of information that allows us to advance the field forward,” Dr. Timmins said. “It allows us to provide patients with better care, more cures and longer survival rates.”

“We are listening to what women have to say about their care and understand that when it comes to these types of health issues, sometimes women like to work exclusively with women. With three female gynecologic oncologists and one female nurse practitioner on staff, we are able to respect that and accommodate those wishes.”

— Heidi Godoy, DO, Health Quest Medical Practice gynecologic oncologist

For information about the gynecologic oncology program at the Dyson Center for Cancer Care, visit healthquest.org/cancer.
Residency Program

An academic emphasis
New residency programs at Nuvance Health New York-based hospitals enhance the high quality of care provided to patients.

While a wealth of medical knowledge is gleaned in the classroom, there is no comparison to the information that is gained through the experience of doing. That is the focus of education provided to resident learners at Nuvance Health.

“Our resident physicians actively work with attending medical staff to take care of patients in our hospitals and outpatient clinics,” said Christopher Stenberg, MBChB, bachelor of surgery, vice president of medical education and designated institutional official for Nuvance Health. “This provides an excellent way to transition from medical school to the workplace. It is also beneficial for Nuvance Health’s attending physicians to have young clinicians who are very up to date on current knowledge. It’s a win-win for everyone.”

Thanks to the partnership between residents and attending physicians, patients of academic hospitals with residency programs can count on lower complication and death rates, because more trained physicians are immediately available to manage care.

A future of excellence
Nuvance Health residency applicants are competing for spaces in a variety of areas, including anesthesia, family medicine, internal medicine, OB/GYN, surgery and transitional medicine. These residency programs may one day evolve into long-term fellowship programs, as well.

“We are transitioning into being a truly academic medical center, and that is exciting for all of us,” Dr. Stenberg said. “We are very pleased with the quality of applicants we have been getting, and hope that a good percentage of those who train with us will stay in the Hudson Valley or western Connecticut, working for us or our partners in the area.”

To learn more about residency programs at Nuvance Health, visit meded.healthquest.org.
2019 Oncology Teaching Day

On Thursday, Dec. 5, 2019, Nuvance Health will host its 2019 Oncology Teaching Day at The Culinary Institute Marriott Pavilion in Hyde Park. The event begins at 8 am, with presentations beginning at 8:30 am and lasting until 4:30 pm. A cocktail reception will be held afterward and conclude at 6:30 pm.

Continuing medical education credits are available for eligible physicians.

Presentations and speakers

• Opening Remarks — Cliff Connery, MD, FACS
• Skin Screening — Ross Zeltser*, MD, FAAD, FACMS
• Pancreatic Screening Research Trial — Richard Frank*, MD
• Breast Cancer Screening — Carinne Anderson*, MD
• Colorectal Screening — Salvatore Buffa*, MD
• GYN-Oncology Screening — Joyce Barlin*, MD, FACOG, FACS
• Advancements in Rectal Cancer Management — Pranat Kumar, MD, FACS
• Lung Screening/Early Lung Cancer Research for Treatment (IELCART) — Huan Joanne Sun, MD
• Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy — Camilo Torres, MD
• Prostate Cancer Screening: Review, Novel Markers and Genetics — Naeem Rahman*, MD
• Advances in Immunotherapy for Cancer Treatment — Rodrigo Erlich, MD
• Hepatobiliary (Pancreas) — Ryan Swan, MD
• Genetic Factors in Breast Cancer — Susan K. Boolbol, MD, FACS
• The Role of the Genetic Counselor — Mariana Niell-Swiller, MS
• Novel Treatment for Metastatic Melanoma — James R. Nitzkorski, MD, FACS
• Head and Neck Cancer Treatment and HPV Disease — David Pfister*, MD
• Computer Surgical Planning for Advanced Head and Neck Reconstruction — Al Haitham Al Shetawi, MD
• Delivering Personalized Care in the OR — Faiz Y. Bhora, MD, FACS

*In the spirit of keeping you well informed, the physicians identified are neither agents nor employees of Nuvance Health or any of its affiliate organizations. These physicians have selected our facilities as the place where they wish to treat and care for private patients.

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