As our system grows to better meet the needs of cancer patients in our region, the Health Quest Medical Practice (HQMP) radiation oncology team is at the forefront of creating a new, system-wide approach to providing care.

The key to this approach is not to duplicate existing services. Instead, success will be measured by our ability to provide these services where they can do the most good for our patients and expand our capabilities across Health Quest.

For example, our radiation oncology team can now discuss patient cases across different sites, both in person and through multidisciplinary teleconferences. It’s not unusual for a patient with an acute problem to initiate treatment in one of our hospitals before transitioning to a site that’s closer to home, all while keeping the same treatment plan and team of radiation oncologists.

To aid these types of transitions, we’ve begun to expand our HQMP surgical oncology services to Putnam Hospital Center. We are also looking into ways of providing additional access to medical oncology care at Putnam Hospital Center. The team is also exploring additional access points to delivering subspecialty care at a new HQMP location in Kingston.

As part of our multidisciplinary approach, we have developed disease-specific tumor boards and conferences. These meetings focus on the newest available techniques and treatments for our patients, including ever-evolving options in the world of immunotherapy. Collaborating in this way allows our physicians to stay educated not only in their respective fields, but also in their colleagues’ specialties and cancer care at large. Specialists can use teleconferencing to discuss these treatments across all of our Health Quest locations, including Vassar Brothers Medical Center, Putnam Hospital Center, Northern Dutchess Hospital and Sharon Hospital.

As you will see in this issue of Oncology Update, Health Quest has made a significant investment in medical education and its importance for our future. Three graduate medical education programs will begin at Health Quest in 2019, with a number of additional programs to follow. These programs complement our recent partnership with Marist College, which will result in a new medical school that will attract medical students to the area, and provide further care and support for patients in our community.

Health Quest will continue to leverage our resources to provide more uniform care throughout our system, while taking advantage of our team’s diverse expertise. In addition, we’re recruiting new talent to help us expand our surgical and medical oncology services. If you’d like to learn more about our program, please call me at 845.483.6920.
The world of medicine is one in which there is always something new to learn. Likewise, HQMP oncology program nurses are driven to stay engaged with the latest information about their chosen profession.

“Any opportunity our nurses have to learn, they take it,” said Kim Secord, RN, Director of Clinical Operations and Quality for Outpatient Oncology Services at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. “By engaging in a robust spectrum of ongoing education, our team is prepared to meet the expectations of our clients — referring physicians — by delivering the highest level of patient care.”

To meet these expectations, oncology nurses with HQMP have recently embraced opportunities to participate in high-level training focused on cancer-related topics and clinical specialties.

Learning as a Team

Specialists from the pharmaceutical field have shared information about treating non-small cell lung cancer as well as advanced ovarian cancer. One training session focused on properly grading adverse events. A competency-based orientation tool enhances each nurse’s ability to move seamlessly between caring for patients with breast cancer and providing assistance in surgery.

“We are invested in making sure our nurses have the tools they need to provide the best patient care and experience.”

“We do that through these educational initiatives that focus on the holistic care of our patients instead of a single disease process,” Secord said.

Oncology nurses may also request additional training on topics not covered during the in-service sessions.

“If three people are interested, we will set up an in-service training session,” Secord said. “Knowledge is power.”
James Nitzkorski, MD, FACS, surgical oncologist and colorectal surgeon with the Health Quest Medical Practice Division of Surgical Oncology and director of gastrointestinal and cutaneous oncology at Health Quest, says it is gratifying for U.S. News & World Report to honor Vassar Brothers Medical Center alongside other high-achieving institutions.

“Surgery is a relatively small part of a successful colorectal cancer program,” Dr. Nitzkorski said. “What differentiates us from other centers is the support the program receives from Vassar Brothers Medical Center and the quality of the entire team, especially the bedside nurses. It is exciting for the program to be measured against and recognized with similar programs based on empirical data because that shows the team’s hard work has paid off.”

Ingredients of Success

A variety of elements helped elevate the colorectal cancer program to its status as a regional leader.

MULTISPECIALTY, PATIENT-FOCUSED CARE FROM START TO FINISH

A nurse navigator contacts patients as they enter the program and guides them through each stage of the care process, from preoperative appointments, to surgery to postoperative recovery. An outstanding team of anesthesiologists and operating room staff helps to ensure patient safety during surgery. A variety of specialists, including gynecologic oncologists, vascular surgeons and hepatobiliary surgeons, are available to assist colorectal surgeons with procedures, as needed. After surgery, nurses, nutritionists, physical therapists, genetic counselors and a large team of clinical specialists care for patients during recovery and provide additional treatment, as necessary. Hepatobiliary and thoracic oncology programs are available to treat liver and lung metastases, respectively.

INNOVATIVE COLLABORATION

“Rectal cancer patients are noteworthy in that they need preoperative treatment from a team of specialists, so during the past year, we created a rectal cancer-specific tumor board,” Dr. Nitzkorski said. “A team that includes representatives from pathology, radiology, medical oncology, radiation oncology and colorectal surgery reviews every rectal cancer case before deciding on a course of treatment. Few hospitals have a tumor board dedicated to rectal cancer.”

LEADING-EDGE SURGERY

Dr. Nitzkorski and his colorectal surgery colleagues, John Choi, MD, and Pranat Kumar, MD, perform many resections in a minimally invasive manner using laparoscopy or robotic-assisted surgery with Vassar Brothers Medical Center’s two da Vinci Surgery System units. Hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemotherapy is available for select patients with stage IV colorectal cancers that have metastasized to the abdomen.

“We can perform practically every type of surgery for colorectal cancer, even highly specialized procedures, at Vassar Brothers Medical Center,” Dr. Nitzkorski said.

“We’re excited about the future of the program. When the new patient pavilion opens in 2020, we’ll be able to offer patients an even better experience for privacy and comfort during recovery.”

Colon Cancer Surgery Recognition

Honored for Colon Cancer Surgery Excellence

Vassar Brothers Medical Center was named a High-Performing Hospital in Colon Cancer Surgery by U.S. News & World Report in early 2018. This recognition is a testament to the effectiveness of a multidisciplinary team with experts in every aspect of colorectal cancer care, including specially trained surgeons.

Vassar Brothers Medical Center will help train the next generation of surgeons, including colorectal surgeons, when Health Quest’s general surgery residency program welcomes its first residents in July 2019.
Meet the Newest Additions to the HQMP Cancer Care Team

In recent months, Health Quest Medical Practice (HQMP) and Vassar Brothers Medical Center welcomed several new physicians and nurse practitioners whose expertise in a variety of specialties enhances cancer treatment for patients.

**Luis G. Sepulveda-Maldonado, MD, Medical Oncology/Hematology**

- Dr. Sepulveda-Maldonado joined Health Quest Medical Practice and Vassar Brothers Medical Center in September 2018.
- He comes to Health Quest after completing a three-year fellowship in hematology/oncology at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus earlier this year.
- Dr. Sepulveda-Maldonado received his medical degree at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus in 2012 and completed a three-year residency in internal medicine there in 2015.

**Huan Huan (Joanne) Sun, MD, Thoracic Surgery**

- A fellowship-trained thoracic surgeon, Dr. Sun joined Health Quest in September 2018 from New York University (NYU).
- She completed her medical education at the NYU School of Medicine, followed by a general surgery residency at the University of Rochester Medical Center.
- Dr. Sun also completed a residency at the University of Rochester Medical Center and has experience as a thoracic surgery research fellow at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.
Nicole Harrison, FNP, MSN

- Harrison has worked as a nurse in several New York State hospitals and medical practices for more than 20 years. She has worked with oncology patients in both inpatient and outpatient settings.
- She joined Health Quest during the summer of 2018 and completed her family nurse practitioner degree at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh. Prior, she earned her bachelor of science in nursing degree and a master of science in nursing degree from Western Governors University.

Carrie Fijal, FNP, MSN

- Fijal joined Health Quest during the summer of 2018. She recently served as clinical research coordinator at the Praxair Cancer Center at Danbury Hospital in Danbury, Connecticut.
- Fijal spent seven years at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, first as a staff nurse, and then as an office practice nurse. She worked primarily with gastrointestinal patients with cancer.
- Fijal received her bachelor of science in nursing degree from Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut, and her master of science in nursing/adult nurse practitioner degree from Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, where she has been an adjunct clinical nursing instructor since 2015.

Kimberly Moore, FNP, MSN

- A family nurse practitioner, Moore joined Health Quest in June 2018.
- Prior to joining Health Quest Medical Practice, Moore served in various nursing roles at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. Moore has worked in a variety of departments, including surgical services, medical surgical/ neurology and the emergency department. Prior to joining the oncology team, she treated pre- and postoperative patients in the practice’s Division of General Surgery.
- Moore received her bachelor of science in nursing degree from the University of Rhode Island in 2008 and her master of science in nursing/family nurse practitioner degree from Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh.
Enhancements in Infusion across the System

Newly renovated facilities, highly trained nurses and access to medical oncology at Northern Dutchess Hospital — these are just a few reasons to send patients to a Health Quest Medical Practice (HQMP) provider for their cancer treatment.

Convenience of care means patients are less likely to miss treatments or fail to complete chemotherapy, according to numerous research studies. Having infusion services available close to home, on the other hand, means patients are more likely to complete therapy, have a higher quality of life and survive or live longer after a cancer diagnosis. That's why it's so important Health Quest is making its facilities bigger, reducing wait times and adding a new medical oncology location in its effort to extend its infusion program's reach.

Medical Oncology and Infusion at Northern Dutchess Hospital

One of our most exciting developments is a new medical oncology practice at Northern Dutchess Hospital. Headed by Alfonso Cutugno, MD, the practice operates side-by-side with a new state-of-the-art infusion center. Featuring two private rooms and seven additional bays, the center allows patients to receive treatment with their physician close by. In addition to standard chemotherapy, the infusion center offers IV immunoglobulin treatment, hydration support and biologic therapies.

“This is a new program,” said Denise George, president of Northern Dutchess Hospital and senior vice president of Health Quest. “We just celebrated our six-month birthday at the end of October.”

“We started seeing patients on the day we opened,” said Carol O’Driscoll, RN, BSN, BS, director of surgical services, who oversees the infusion program.

Patients are very excited, reported Maylen Rodriguez, RN, BSN, MSN, clinical coordinator of oncology infusion.

“They enjoy coming to us,” she said. “They enjoy the excellent care we provide them.”

So far, patients in their earlier 20s to age 101 have received treatment, George said.

“The camaraderie among our patients is overwhelming,” she observed. “Since we're a smaller center with just nine chairs, it's more intimate for patients. They become very close. They've even started a book club! It's nice to see the bonds that develop across the generations.”

The space is a welcoming setting for such camaraderie, George said.

“We designed the infusion center with the intention of creating a welcoming, enjoyable place to be,” she said. “We selected recliners with attachable tables so patients can work on crafts or computers. Many patients are there for hours during the day, so this is where they do their work, schooling or entertain themselves. They can recharge devices or use the iPods we’ve stocked. We also provide snacks or meals for patients on extended stays. This all results in a very warm atmosphere.”

O’Driscoll noted the proximity to the infusion center allows patients to visit their physicians between treatments, too.

“Dr. Cutugno started here in April, when the practice opened,” O’Driscoll said. “We work very closely with him. He is a Health Quest Medical Practice physician. Along with Dr. Leonardo [James Leonardo, MD], Dr. Cutugno has been key to guiding this new program.”

Perhaps most important, the new infusion center allows patients to receive care closer to home than ever before. Cancer patients can focus on receiving treatment and devote less mental space to their transportation and physical exhaustion from long commutes, as well as missed work.

Now we’re averaging 11 patients daily. Most of them express how delighted they are to receive chemotherapy services close to home. It makes life so much easier for them.”
The new infusion center at Northern Dutchess Hospital in Rhinebeck.

The exterior of Northern Dutchess Hospital.
Northern Dutchess is not the only Health Quest location building out enhanced oncology services. The Dyson Center for Cancer Care at Vassar Brothers Medical Center is putting its oncology infusion services into a dedicated, expanded suite.

“We are breaking down some walls to add space,” said Radhika Rachamalla, MD, practicing medical hematologist and oncologist, and acting medical director at the Dyson Breast Center at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. “This will increase the number of chairs we can have and open up the space more. Meanwhile, we’re developing infusion that is not related to cancer into a separate program. We’re adding to the nursing staff and looking at expanded hours in the future for oncology infusion.”

Dr. Rachamalla identified newly diagnosed cancer patients’ most pressing concerns as time and money: how swiftly they can access treatment and how they can find the funds to pay for it. The newly enhanced infusion center, she said, addresses the first concern and provides assistance with the second, too.

“Any patient who is given a cancer diagnosis and a recommendation for therapy is first concerned with how quickly they can access therapy, and then with finances,” Dr. Rachamalla said. “At the Dyson Center, we have social workers and a therapy program to help patients through this process. The social workers round in the infusion center, sit with patients, discuss their financial concerns and provide emotional support while patients are receiving treatment. Our social workers are trained in measuring distress; any patient whose distress is exceptionally high is referred for counseling.

“Another concern is transportation. Some patients need weekly treatments and other patients need to visit daily. So, we partner with the American Cancer Society and look for volunteers who can transport patients. We work with insurance companies to get these services covered for patients.”

Nutritionists also do rounds to speak with patients in the infusion center, Dr. Rachamalla said. The nutrition office is conveniently located on the first floor, so patients can quickly get answers to their questions. Geneticists, too, see infusion patients, making the infusion experience a nexus for the delivery of multidisciplinary care without the need to schedule multiple additional appointments.
Oncology Nursing — A Highly Specialized Practice

At both Northern Dutchess Hospital and the Dyson Center for Cancer Care at Vassar Brothers Medical Center, highly trained oncology nurses make up the backbone of the infusion team.

“A strong component of our infusion program is our excellent nursing providers,” O’Driscoll said.

“Every day our patients see a consistent group; in fact, we have the same team now as we did the first day we opened. Patients establish strong bonds with their care deliverers because they see the same nurses regularly. The nurses really understand what each patient’s needs are and where he or she is in therapy.”

Due to high patient volume, Northern Dutchess Hospital is looking to add more oncology infusion nurses, O’Driscoll continues. These nurses, like those on staff, will be certified in chemotherapy and biologic therapy and highly trained for the important work they perform.

The Dyson Center for Cancer Care at Vassar Brothers Medical Center, too, is adding to an already-robust nursing staff.

“We are adding more nurses because our need is growing,” Dr. Rachamalla said of the Dyson Center team. “Our nurses are terrific. They not only know the medical aspect of infusion thoroughly, but they are caring individuals. They often call patients the day after treatment to check up on them. In addition to their high qualifications, they understand patients’ emotional and physical needs.”

In fact, before the first infusion session, each Dyson Center patient sits down with the oncology pharmacist and a nurse. Together, they discuss what the treatment will entail and what the side effects may be.

“Patients may feel apprehensive at their first visit,” Dr. Rachamalla said. “We give them the opportunity to go over everything until they are satisfied and every question has been answered for them.”

Nurse Spotlight

MAYLEN RODRIGUEZ

For some nurses, the impulse to care for others starts at a young age. Maylen Rodriguez, RN, BSN, MSN and clinical coordinator of oncology infusion at Northern Dutchess Hospital, became her grandmother’s caregiver when she was a young girl.

“My grandma was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer,” Rodriguez recalled. “I was touched by the excellent care the nurses provided her. I hope to give others what was given to her. That’s why I became an oncology nurse.”

In fact, it was her grandmother who told her she needed to become a nurse. Rodriguez has studied many years to fulfill this dream.

“I said, ‘I don’t know, Grandma, I don’t like needles,’” Rodriguez said. “But she encouraged me. She was my hero. She smiled and sang every day of her life. She told me, ‘It’s what you give that matters.’”

Now Rodriguez is living out her grandmother’s dream. Currently she’s in school to obtain a PhD in nursing science.

Rodriguez tries to keep a smile on her face and works to add the little touches patients love, things to make them feel comfortable and trusting.

“Patients see us over and over for bloodwork, perhaps with a new diagnosis, and they’re often upset,” Rodriguez said. “We cheer them up and make them laugh. It’s great to be a part of a community that is making a difference for our patients. I learn something every day — from my managers, my co-workers and especially my patients!”
A Natural Home for Cancer Patients

Health Quest physicians may sometimes send patients outside the community to tertiary care centers for treatment, an approach Dr. Rachamalla said overlooks the advantages of cancer care at Health Quest.

“We have a robust medical oncology program,” she said. “We offer chemotherapy, biologic therapy and immunotherapy. Our nurses are certified in both chemotherapy and biologic therapies. Additionally, we have research programs, so patients are treated under research protocols at the Dyson Center.”

At Northern Dutchess Hospital or the Dyson Center for Cancer Care at Vassar Brothers Medical Center, patients can receive the same specialized treatments they would be prescribed at larger facilities, but without getting “lost in the system,” Dr. Rachamalla said.

“We can offer any drug, except for specialized anti-rejection therapies, that patients are prescribed by their medical oncologist,” she said. “Our board-certified pharmacists are specially trained in oncologic medication. They’re on staff and constantly present in each infusion center. Like our nurses, they maintain a deep knowledge base in medical oncology and keep up-to-date on the state of evidence-based practices. We want community physicians to know there is no need for patients to be transferred away from Health Quest. They can receive the same or better care here, in a personalized setting with familiar faces around them.”

“As people age, unfortunately cancer becomes more of a risk,” George said. “It is harder to travel, too. We want our local physicians to know we have a program here to which they can refer patients. We are excited to offer infusion therapy here in their home community, in a warm environment surrounded by caring professionals.”

To learn more, visit healthquest.org/cancer.
Clinical Trials

Research Roundup
Clinical trials and research opportunities at the Health Quest family of hospitals provide hope to local patients while paving the way for future treatment options.

Many oncology treatments, especially those studied in clinical trials, need to be performed frequently. For patients in the mid-Hudson Valley looking for experimental treatment options, Vassar Brothers Medical Center provides a convenient location that can lessen the burden of treatment and cut back on travel time.

“There are very few hospitals or physician practices offering research in the area,” said William Rausch, clinical research manager, Division of Clinical Research at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. “We don’t want patients to travel two hours away for research and therapy.”

Current Studies
Rausch believes clinical trials provide vital treatment options for patients who have exhausted conventional methods.

“There’s the perception that scientific research will provide a distant benefit for society, but the truth is it can provide good treatment options for patients right now,” Rausch said.

One of those treatment options is an immunotherapy agent called Niraparib, which is being studied as a maintenance therapy for ovarian cancer after primary treatments, such as chemotherapy, are administered. This clinical trial is one of the first gynecological oncology studies performed at Vassar Brothers Medical Center, which serves as the oncology research hub for the Health Quest family of hospitals.

“We have other studies in the pipeline that will examine distinct immunotherapy agents for conditions such as colorectal cancer,” Rausch said.

Constant Improvement
While some studies examine new treatments, others attempt to improve the outcomes of existing treatment options. One such study is hoping to reduce surgical complications for patients with lung cancer who are smokers.

“We help them choose a date to quit smoking and provide behavioral intervention,” Rausch said. “Some participants also receive randomized medical assistance.”

“We participate in studies sponsored by pharmaceutical companies to investigate new drugs. We also participate in federally funded studies through organizations such as the National Cancer Institute clinical trials cooperative group. Most of our studies are national or international and look for new treatments for breast, lung and other cancers.”

— William Rausch, Clinical Research Manager, Division of Clinical Research, Vassar Brothers Medical Center

Other studies focus on diagnostic and preventive techniques that may provide better detection for certain cancers, resulting in earlier and potentially life-saving treatment for patients.

“One of our largest trials is part of the International Early Lung Cancer Action Program,” Rausch said. “We offer low-dose CT scans for patients who are potentially at risk for lung cancer.”

These low-dose screenings are given at Northern Dutchess Hospital and Putnam Hospital Center, in addition to Vassar Brothers Medical Center.

Examining Results
Though Vassar Brothers Medical Center participates in many national and international trials, we recently completed a study of our own and will review the data soon.

“We offered randomized massages to patients prior to breast cancer surgery and measured their anxiety levels,” Rausch said. “We wanted to see if we could reduce their anxiety before surgery. If so, it may be helpful to surgical outcomes.”

Visit healthquest.org/healthstudy to learn more about research and clinical trials.
When Vassar Brothers Medical Center implements a new treatment or technique in the field of radiation oncology, that protocol is also implemented at Putnam Hospital Center and Ulster Radiation Oncology Center. “We’re interconnected, which means we try to do the same treatments and protocols across all of our institutions,” said Camilo Torres, MD, medical director for the department of radiation oncology at Vassar Brothers Medical Center.

Recent advancements across all three institutions have resulted in safer and more effective treatments for many types of cancer, including breast, prostate, brain and lung, as well as gynecological malignancies. “The driving force is always bettering our patients’ care,” Dr. Torres said. “We want patients to know they don’t have to travel far to receive the care they need.”

**Techniques and Therapies**

**DEEP INSPIRATION BREATH-HOLD** is a technique used during radiation therapy for left breast malignancies to help minimize the amount of radiation delivered to the heart. Patients are directed to breathe in and hold it while radiation is delivered to tumors. This action pulls the heart away from the chest wall, limiting the amount of radiation exposure to healthy tissue.

“This technique has helped us treat advanced lymphatic disease that was impossible to treat in the past due to the proximity of the area to the chest wall and heart,” Dr. Torres said.

**HIGH DOSE RATE BRACHYTHERAPY** helps deliver radiation to gynecological cancers and is also designed to limit radiation exposure to healthy tissues. “The radioactive material conforms to the area of interest, resulting in fewer side effects,” Dr. Torres said.

**HYPOFRACTIONATED RADIATION THERAPIES** for both prostate cancer and early-stage breast cancer help patients finish their treatment in almost half the time as conventional therapy.

“Radiation therapy for prostate cancer used to require more than 40 sessions over eight or nine weeks of treatment,” Dr. Torres said. “Now, we’re doing it in 25 sessions over four or five weeks.”

**STEREOTACTIC RADIOSURGERY (SRS) AND STEREOTACTIC BODY RADIOTHERAPY (SBRT)** are nonsurgical radiation therapies used to treat brain and body tumors, respectively. The outpatient procedures deliver precise, high doses of radiation to tumors in just a few treatments.

“We offer SBRT for early-stage lung cancer as part of a clinical trial to see whether radiosurgery or traditional surgery is better tolerated among patients,” Dr. Torres said. “We’re also starting to use SBRT for abdominal malignancies, including pancreas and liver lesions.”

**Looking Toward the Future**

Open research protocols at Vassar Brothers Medical Center examine new treatments and techniques that will spread to Putnam Hospital Center and Ulster Radiation Oncology Center (UROC), should they prove effective. “Patients don’t have to drive to the city to enroll in national protocols,” said Camilo Torres, MD, medical director for the department of radiation oncology at Vassar Brothers Medical Center. “Offering the best data-driven protocols and accessibility for new investigational protocols is paramount to our care.”
Camilo Torres, MD, radiation oncologist with Health Quest Medical Practice, examines a patient.

Camilo Torres, MD, assists a patient during radiation treatment at the Dyson Center for Cancer Care in Poughkeepsie.
The Health Quest family of hospitals is making advanced oncological procedures more accessible to patients throughout the mid-Hudson Valley.

“We’ve expanded in medical, radiation and surgical oncology over the last two years,” said Ryan Swan, MD, hepatobiliary and pancreatic surgeon, Health Quest Medical Practice Surgical Oncology. “We’ve added a specialist in thoracic surgery and an outstanding head and neck surgeon, and we’ve started going to Putnam Hospital Center to see patients.”

Though many surgical oncologists from the Health Quest family of hospitals are based out of the Dyson Center for Cancer Care at Vassar Brothers Medical Center, physicians, including Dr. Swan, have been performing surgical procedures at Putnam Hospital Center and seeing patients in the outpatient office there.

“We’ve been collaborating with surgeons, gastroenterologists, and medical and radiation oncologists to treat patients with cancer. The complexity of procedures at Putnam Hospital Center has been ramping up thanks to this collaboration.”

— Ryan Swan, MD, Hepatobiliary and Pancreatic Surgeon, Division of Surgical Oncology at Health Quest Medical Practice
Putnam Hospital Center is home to a comprehensive cancer program made up of talented physicians, nurses, anesthesiologists and more who work closely together to deliver care. The collaboration with physicians from Vassar Brothers Medical Center is not meant to replace this care. Instead, the partnership will build on the foundation of excellence Putnam Hospital Center has already established.

“We’re not looking to reinvent the wheel,” Dr. Swan said. “We plan to offer services that Putnam Hospital Center doesn’t have or augment existing services so that local patients don’t have to go elsewhere for care.”

The new team members involved in this partnership bring the needed expertise to expand care in the area.

“We’ve been very selective about the physicians we’ve recruited for this partnership,” Dr. Swan said. “We want patients to get the care they need close to home, where they can be near family.”

Dr. Swan has considered Putnam Hospital Center his second medical home for the past year and works in a temporary office there. Plans are being made for the creation of a permanent office to house Dr. Swan and his colleagues, many of whom joined to accommodate Health Quest’s expansion.

One of those colleagues is Al Haitham Al Shetawi, MD, DMD, maxillofacial, head and neck surgical oncologist, Division of Surgical Oncology at Health Quest.

“Dr. Al Shetawi has been with us for about a year and will start traveling to Putnam Hospital Center as well,” Dr. Swan said. “He has an exceptional skill set, including head and neck resections and microvascular reconstruction.”

Huan Huan (Joanne) Sun, MD, thoracic surgeon, Division of Surgical Oncology at Health Quest, will provide additional thoracic surgery capabilities at Putnam Hospital Center.

“Thoracic surgery has been available at Putnam Hospital Center for some time, but they’ve needed to stretch their resources,” Dr. Swan said. “Dr. Sun will be a big help to that community.”

Visit healthquest.org/PHC to learn more about services at Putnam Hospital Center.
Graduate Medical Education Update

Graduate Medical Education (GME) at Health Quest

Health Quest plans to welcome dozens of residency applicants in the fall who will help improve cancer care in the mid-Hudson Valley.

Health Quest received institutional approval from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) last year. Since then, residency programs in general surgery, internal medicine and family medicine have received ACGME accreditation.

“We’ll be recruiting general surgery, internal medicine and family medicine residents this fall,” said Cynthia Powell, MHA, director of medical education at Health Quest.

In addition, Health Quest is hoping to launch six more programs by 2020 and has already submitted applications for anesthesia, OB/GYN and transitional year education programs.

“We’re searching for directors to lead our other three programs, which will cover emergency medicine, psychiatry and orthopedics,” Powell said.

Once applications are submitted, ACGME will perform a site visit before accreditation is finalized.

Lasting Impact

Health Quest is committed to medical education, as evidenced by the development of its GME training programs and the recent announcement of the Marist Health Quest School of Medicine, which will be located primarily at Vassar Brothers Medical Center.

“An academic system tends to be more rigorous in its approach to healthcare, including cancer care,” said Chris Stenberg, MD, vice president of GME at Health Quest. “Young, inquiring minds are stimulating for doctors, nurses and other team members involved in cancer care for patients.”

Residents will come to Health Quest in 2019. Health Quest will choose candidates from hundreds of hopeful medical students for its general surgery, family medicine and internal medicine education programs. These residents may come from colleges anywhere in the world. They will bring their own personal expertise to Health Quest, while building up and learning from the experience of others.

“Having residents means more attention and focus is placed on patients,” Dr. Stenberg said. “As part of their residencies, students will be actively involved in quality programs for the hospital and in teaching other students as well.”

The medical education programs at Health Quest will also encourage newly trained providers to stay in the area, improving access to medical services for local residents.

“This initiative is helping develop our community,” Powell said. “Not only is it improving patient care, but it’s contributing to economic growth by bringing more people to the area.”

Visit meded.healthquest.org to learn more about educational opportunities at Health Quest.