

IT MATTERS.



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OF WINE & ROSES GALA
Patients & Physicians Celebrate Life

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COMMUNITY EVENT
Boosting Confidence Through Self-Care

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On the Cover
The Astera Team Together as One!

Message From Our President

Dear All,

At Astera Cancer Care, our commitment to patient-centric care extends beyond oncology to meet the diverse needs of our community. We are proud to have extended our family to encompass Solara Health NJ, a community-based practice offering a wide range of specialties and services. Solara's dedicated team of physicians specialize in family medicine, internal medicine, rheumatology, and interventional pulmonology, ensuring comprehensive care tailored to each patient's unique needs.

In this issue of It Matters, we are excited to spotlight the heart and soul of our practice-our people. We showcase the community that is our staff and our patients. From our annual retreat and annual staff picnic focused on continued education and team-building, to our partnerships with other organizations, we are dedicated to ensuring our patients have access to the holistic resources they need to support their mind, body, and souls. Together, we strive to provide the highest quality care for patients like Fanni and Melissa, whose inspiring stories you'll read about in these pages.

Additionally, you'll learn more from our experts on advanced treatment options, such as low-dose radiation therapy for osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis stands as one of the most prevalent challenges, impacting millions across the nation with its debilitating effects on mobility and quality of life, and we are proud to offer hope and healing to those in need.

Thank you for being a part of our community and for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

Bruno S. Fang, MD
President, Astera Cancer Care



American Cancer Society's 38th Annual Night of Wine & Roses Gala

Astera Cancer Care is a proud sponsor of the American Cancer Society's Wine & Roses Gala. This year's 38th annual gala was hosted on May 10, 2024, at The Palace at Somerset Park, marking 110 years of cancer breakthroughs within our "Carousel of Progress."

The gala honored Dr. Arthur Perry and the Emil & Rita Weissfeld Family Foundation for their remarkable contributions. Astera's Maggie Lytle, RN, Breast Surgical Patient Navigator at Astera Breast Care, performed a variety of musical hits with her group "The Keys and the Klatter" during the event's cocktail hour. Dr. Michael and Marlene Nissenblatt's tireless efforts as chairs ensured the event's success, drawing nearly 500 attendees and raising over \$530,000.



EVENT HISTORY

In the past six years, Night of Wine and Roses has raised over \$2.5 million to support the American Cancer Society's mission to save lives, celebrate lives, and lead the fight for a world without cancer. It is one of New Jersey's premier fundraising events with national notoriety.

The American Cancer Society is the nationwide, community-based, voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives, and diminishing suffering from cancer, through research, education, advocacy, and service.

Progress against cancer has triggered a 33% decline in U.S. deaths over the past two decades, which equates to 3.8 million fewer cancer deaths. But we can't stop there.



Dr. Michael Nissenblatt & Event Honoree, Dr. Arthur Perry

EVENT STATS

- Just under 500 attendees.
- \$530,000 and counting!
- Honoring Dr. Arthur Perry and the Emil & Rita Weissfeld Family Foundation.
- Celebrated 110 years of wins against cancer, recognizing the breakthroughs in cancers we've seen in our "Carousel of Progress."





Walking the Extra Mile: Employee Hits 2.1 Million Steps in Company Challenge

Going the distance together, each step of the way

Thanks to the six participating teams of Astera Cancer Care and Solara's second Walk Fit Challenge, a long-distance walking challenge with prizes for the first-place walker and team. The first Walk Fit Challenge began in the summer of 2023 with the goal to theoretically walk from Trenton, New Jersey, to Los Angeles, California, a distance totaling 2,729 miles. Kicking off on January 15th and running through March 31, 2024, the second Walk Fit Challenge featured the same mileage goal as last year's challenge and was a huge success.

The challenge featured 89 total walkers and was organized into six teams: Team Scrambled Legs And Achin', Steposaurus Rexes, Walkin' on Sunshine, Walkinators, Happy Feet, and Walkin' it Out. The teams consisted of a diverse group of members from several departments and locations. Each team, comprising 15 walkers, had a team lead responsible for logging and reporting weekly team steps. Each participant was required to use a pedometer to track their steps and estimate the distance walked throughout the challenge. We are thrilled to announce the Walk Fit Challenge winners and are proud of the hard work each participant and team contributed, one step at a time.

First Place Walker

A big congratulations to our First-Place Walker, Kathleen Hernandez, RN who completed 2.1M steps and 989 miles throughout the 11-week challenge. This is the impressive equivalent of walking from New Jersey to Florida. Kathleen also won the first Walk Fit Challenge, but this time, she surpassed her previous winning steps total! She continues to be the one to beat in this challenge.

"It's rewarding to know my efforts paid off. I'm surprised I surpassed my previous steps," Kathleen says. "It feels good to win again, but now the pressure is on to defend my title."

As the winner of the last two challenges, Kathleen worked to stay motivated.

"I'm very competitive, so hearing that the other teams were catching up to us kept me motivated," says Kathleen. "Whenever I'd see my teammates walking around, it motivated me to move too. Our patients would see me pacing the treatment room and knew we were competing. They also kept me accountable and would tell me to keep walking."

First Place Team

Congratulations to our first-place team, Team Scrambled Legs and Achin', for amassing 13.3M steps and 6,338 miles.



1st Annual STAFF PICNIC

On Saturday, May 11, staff members from Astera Cancer Care and Solara Health NJ, and their families gathered at Forest Lodge in Warren, New Jersey, for the first annual company picnic. Over 200 attendees enjoyed an assortment of delicious BBQ, music, entertaining activities, fun games, and even a dunk tank.

The picnic was a hub of fun and excitement, with a DJ who elevated the mood with music and fun freebies like branded frisbees and picnic blankets. Event attendees had a blast competing in ping pong, basketball, and volleyball, and enjoying carnival trailer games with prizes and bumper cars. There was something for everyone, including a kiddie corner, complete with activities like a duck pond, spin art, and temporary tattoos, ensuring that even the youngest members of the Astera & Solara family had a memorable time.

The dunk tank was a big hit, with Dr. Bruno S. Fang and Jake Canavan taking one for the team by volunteering to get dunked. Attendees took turns aiming for the target with hopes of dunking one of the volunteers, and at one point senior staff successfully sent Dr. Fang plunging into the water!

The first annual staff picnic was a big success. It fostered team-building and camaraderie through a fun-filled gathering of friends, family, and staff. This is just the beginning of Astera and Solara's company picnics, as we continue to work towards our shared mission of delivering the best patient care possible!



Dr. Brian Canavan

Advanced Practice Provider Joshua Oderanti

New Patient Intake Coordinator Daisy Gallego





Redefining Cancer Care: Astera Cancer Care's Innovative Palliative Program



Tina Basenese, MA, APN, ACHPN

Palliative care has emerged as a critical component of cancer treatment, providing comprehensive support beyond medical intervention. Astera Cancer Care, a pioneer in integrating palliative care within community oncology settings,

exemplifies this panoramic approach. Board Certified Palliative Care Nurse Practitioner Tina Basenese, MA, APN, ACHPN, of Astera Cancer Care, discusses the transformative impact of their palliative care program on patients' quality of life and survival.

"Palliative care works best directly alongside treatment," Tina explains. "Palliative care may even extend life, contrary to what many patients might think." Palliative care plays a vital role in cancer treatment, aiming to alleviate physical symptoms while addressing the emotional, social, and psychological needs of patients and their families.

Astera Cancer Care's in-house palliative program reflects its commitment to early and comprehensive support. "We created an in-house program with specialists to offer this to

you early in your cancer care. You don't have to search for this on your own or wait until you're no longer getting disease-directed treatment," Tina asserts. This proactive approach ensures that patients receive the benefits of palliative care from their diagnosis, helping them manage symptoms and maintain treatment regimens more effectively and comfortably.

"Palliative care is also called supportive care because its intention is to support you and your family, too," Tina emphasizes. "More commonly, palliative care is offered in the acute care setting, like a hospital, and utilized when treatment is complicated or not working well. It is a very different experience in the community-based setting. "Personally, I am unaware of any private practice oncology group that has embedded palliative medicine in their community-based clinic in New Jersey," she says. "We're changing the culture of our practice to be kinder, gentler, and more empathetic." This integration within a community setting ensures continuity of care and a more personalized patient experience.

Tina stresses the importance of understanding and embracing the terminology associated with palliative care. "Some patients and professionals have suggested "palliative care" change its name due to its historical connotation with hospice care. To that end, I

am more inclined to continue to re-educate about the value of palliative care as a stand-alone specialty and allow hospice to be appropriately linked to expert end-of-life care. Let's be honest: no one wants to need an oncologist but we accept oncology as the expert care for the treatment of cancer. Palliative care is the expert care for managing distressing pain and symptoms associated with serious illnesses."

For Tina and the team at Astera, palliative care is about more than just medical treatment. "It's the deepest level of caring. It's about caring about you and your day-to-day, week-to-week outcomes," she reflects. This philosophy drives Astera's mission to provide not only excellent medical care but also emotional and psychological care, enhancing patients' overall well-being.

To further epitomize the value, studies show that early palliative care leads to longer survival. "I want you to feel as good as you possibly can every day so you don't miss one chemo, one immunotherapy treatment, one family event, or one day doing something meaningful to you," she continues. "A Palliative Care Nurse Practitioner will ensure that your shortness of breath or cough is managed. They are going to focus on that you're not sleeping, that you're in pain, or that you have no appetite." This comprehensive management of symptoms allows patients to adhere to their treatment plans more consistently, potentially improving their long-term outcomes. Additionally, medical cannabis is offered as part of the symptom management toolkit, helping to alleviate neuropathy, anxiety, and nausea. Astera Cancer Care's palliative program also emphasizes advance care planning and discussing each unique person's goals of care. "The goals can often change over time. At some

point, the main goal is longevity, while later the focus may shift to control, autonomy, and quality time," Tina notes. The program includes support from social workers who provide both practical assistance and psychotherapy, ensuring that patients and their families receive individualized, holistic care.

Astera Cancer Care's innovative palliative program sets a new standard for patient-centered care. By embedding palliative care within their community-based oncology practice, they provide comprehensive support that addresses the full spectrum of patient needs. This approach improves the quality of life for patients, supports their families, and ensures that those facing serious illness receive the care they need to live their lives to the fullest. As Tina Basenese states, "It's about really caring about you, your outcomes, your family."

Your decisions and choices make all the difference in managing your health and maintaining control over your treatment

"It's the deepest level of caring. It's about caring about you and your day-to-day, week-to-week outcomes."

Tina Basenese

journey, regardless of your suspected prognosis. To learn more about how Astera Cancer Care can better support you or your loved ones, visit our website and watch videos of Tina Basenese discussing our distinctive palliative program.



To learn more, scan QR Code or visit: [astercancercare.org](https://www.astercancercare.org)



Dr. Amit Patel & Founder Rochelle-R.E. Magno

Supporting Community Through Glamming the Warrior

Boosting confidence through self-care

At Astera Cancer Care, we're proud to be involved with Glamming the Warrior, a nonprofit organization dedicated to boosting confidence and self-esteem



for cancer patients and survivors. Glamming the Warrior is rooted in community and dedicated to brightening the spirits of cancer patients through a campaign that provides glamming, styling, wellness, and spa services to selected "warriors." In order to become a warrior, patients must be nominated by another person via video, sharing information

about the nominee's fight against cancer. Glamming the Warrior is committed to empowering cancer patients to embrace their self-image regardless of what stage of their cancer journey.

Astera's involvement with the organization began two years ago when Medical Oncologist Dr. Amit Patel's patient was selected as a warrior. When Glamming the Warrior's Founder and President Rochelle-R.E. Magno discovered Dr. Patel was this patient's oncologist, she was eager to get him more involved with the organization.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Patel at the launch of Astera's new office location in Jersey City and it was immediately clear that collaborating with someone who shares the same passion for honoring our patients was the right choice," says Rochelle. "He is a powerful and compassionate force, and I am thrilled that we share the same vision of making our honorees feel special.

Clyda was the first patient of his that I had the honor of recognizing last year. This year, I was delighted to continue this tradition with Melissa, another one of his remarkable patients."

"I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Patel at the launch of Astera's new office location in Jersey City and it was immediately clear that collaborating with someone who shares the same passion for honoring our patients was the right choice."

Rochelle-R.E. Magno

Magno saw how dedicated Dr. Patel was to his patients, who often start to experience cosmetic changes after receiving chemotherapy, which is why she thought there was a strong alignment between Glamming the Warrior and Dr. Patel's collaboration.

Supporting Community Through Glamming the Warrior

Boosting confidence through self-care

"The body image that becomes altered for patients can affect them permanently, but more so at the time of treatment in terms of their spirit and emotional stability," says Dr. Patel. "It was very important for me to get involved in an organization that celebrates these changes and shows patients that they are temporary." Glamming the Warrior offers glam sessions to uplift patients' spirits and emotional well-being.

In April 2023, Dr. Patel's patient Melissa, age 46, was diagnosed with stage I breast cancer. Melissa, a mother of three boys, served in the army for 15 years and considers herself very resilient. 25 years ago she had a benign cyst removed, separate to her cancer, but didn't present with any symptoms when the cancer was found. She underwent oncoplastic breast reduction surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy to treat her breast cancer, and is now in remission.

Melissa's care team consisted of Dr. Patel, who referred her to Breast Surgeon Dr. Darren Sachs.

"Dr. Patel is amazing. You see him and know everything is going to be ok. The staff at Astera has always been great." Melissa says. "Dr. Patel and Dr. Sachs are rockstars. They saved my life."

Dr. Patel was passionate about getting Melissa involved with Glamming the Warrior. "I was nominated and then chosen. From there, it was a whirlwind. It was amazing. They scheduled a spa day, beautification day, massage, facial, manicure, and pedicure," Melissa says.

Melissa and Dr. Patel both attended the Glamming the Warrior Gala in February 2024. When reflecting on attending the Glamming the Warrior gala, Dr. Patel says, "It was very emotional because I was able to see my patient being honored in such a great way."

Prior to the gala, the six VIP Honorees had a glamming session, followed by a professional photoshoot. These portraits were then revealed for the VIP Honorees and gala attendees to see for the first time during the gala, which was an emotional experience.

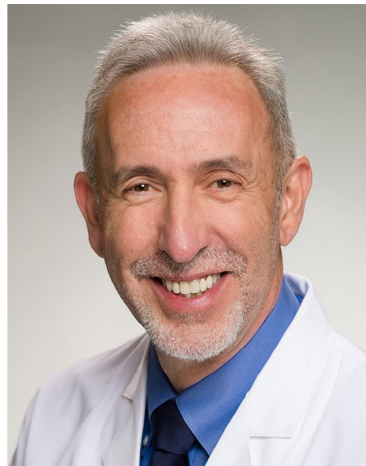
"Everything has been so uplifting," Melissa says about her experience with Glamming the Warrior. "It's been so much fun. I definitely recommend others get involved."



Melissa

Low-Dose Radiation in the Treatment of Osteoarthritis

The future of osteoarthritic treatment



Edward Soffen, MD

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis and a major health issue in the United States, both physically and economically. So, what is osteoarthritis? It's a degenerative joint disease where the tissues in the joint deteriorate over time, causing pain and loss of function and mobility in arthritic joints. Osteoarthritis has a significant impact on quality of life and often occurs in the hands, shoulders, knees, and hips as people age.

About six months ago, Dr. Edward Soffen, a Radiation Oncologist at Astera Princeton Radiation Oncology, discovered a review article out of Europe that featured information about

the use of low-dose radiation in the treatment of osteoarthritis, along with other conditions like tendinitis, bursitis, dupuytren's, and plantar fasciitis. He became interested in researching this topic, and learned that radiation oncologists often used low-dose radiation to treat these types of inflammatory processes. According to Dr. Soffen, almost 80% of radiation oncologists in Europe use low-dose radiation to treat inflammatory conditions like osteoarthritis, but not many radiation oncologists use it in the United States, even though it is FDA-approved.

When high-dose radiation is given for cancer, the radiation is anti-proliferative, which means it stops cells from dividing and kills cells when they go through a cell division. Low-dose radiation has an anti-inflammatory effect by killing white blood cells that are causing inflammation very quickly and inhibiting other inflammatory cells from entering the joints.

"I started to investigate. I found one or two people in the United States who were doing it and I asked them what the results were. They said it was phenomenal. They had incredible

response rates that were durable with very low doses of radiation," Dr. Soffen says. "They found there were no side effects to the treatment or long-term issues. They were getting incredibly good response rates with much less pain, if not complete pain relief, and better mobility in the joint of the hip, knee, foot, or shoulder."

After Dr. Soffen uncovered these results, he began discussing the implementation of low-dose radiation at Astera to treat inflammatory conditions. Immediately, some of his colleagues volunteered to try this treatment, so he started by trying the treatment on colleagues and saw incredible results. Astera is dedicated to staying at the forefront of medical advancements and providing cutting-edge treatments to patients.

"We tried it on almost 10 individuals and had a 100% response rate," he says. One patient was a woman who underwent low-dose radiation treatment on her hip. After treatment, she was able to practice yoga again after not being able to practice for several decades. Another woman

who had her knee treated and was able to walk without a limp. There was also a patient who used sign language as her profession, and her hands became so arthritic that she couldn't work anymore. Dr. Soffen treated her hands, and now she's able to sign again. The results continue to be effective.

"I got very enthusiastic about offering it to people," he says. "We started offering it to patients. We've treated about 30 people and have had tremendous response rates and no side effects from the treatment." Dr. Soffen has been administering the treatment to patients who have very debilitating arthritic joints for six months and hasn't had anyone experience recurring pain. "It's been very gratifying. We've treated almost every joint so far," he says.

While Dr. Soffen has observed a 100% response rate, the literature suggests an 80% response rate, indicating the likelihood of some individuals experiencing recurrent pain. However, upon receiving a second treatment, the response rate notably improves.

When reflecting on the future of low-dose radiation in osteoarthritic treatment, Dr. Soffen says, "I'd like to see it move earlier in the course of osteoarthritic treatment. I think we will see people earlier and earlier with their arthritic complaints so that they don't suffer for five years having to get injections, consuming non-steroidal medication, or even joint replacement surgery."

Astera is committed to providing patients with the highest standard of care and support.

Dr. Soffen adds, "We take tender, loving care of our patients. The experience from door to door is very smooth and efficient. From the front desk to our therapists, everyone is treated like family. And that's the way we honor the trust of being able to care for our patients."

Call 609-655-5755 to schedule an appointment at Astera's Princeton Radiation Oncology office in Monroe.



References:
[NIH: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases: Osteoarthritis](#)



The Beginning of a New Phase of Life

Fanni, 37, was 28 weeks pregnant when she was diagnosed with cancer. “I felt like my world ended at that moment,” Fanni recounts. The health and safety of her baby were her main concern upon hearing the news. “I prayed, and God gave me the peace that I needed. I said okay, let it go, and let the doctors do their work. That's when I met the Astera team.”

In May 2023, Fanni became extremely ill. She was unable to walk, had uncontrolled vomiting, and could barely talk due to a chronic cough. She went to the emergency room and received an MRI and CAT scan, which detected she had stage 4 lung cancer that had metastasized to her brain. Miraculously, her baby was healthy. The hospital where Fanni was being treated connected her with an incredible team of doctors from Astera Cancer Care, including her oncologist, Dr. Ellen Ronnen. “It's game-changing when you have a group of doctors who listen and help you like I found at Astera,” says Fanni.

About 5 months prior to receiving her cancer diagnosis, Fanni was sick with a cold, which she says never went away. Following the start of this cold, she developed a



Ellen Ronnen, MD
Medical Oncology, Hematology

The Beginning of a New Phase of Life

Continued

cough. She went to her obstetrician and primary care doctor, and was treated for her cough and acid reflux. Unfortunately, her symptoms didn't improve. In April, she went to the emergency room and was diagnosed with pneumonia. She received a chest CT scan, which showed a small mass in her chest. The doctors didn't think it was cancerous, but weren't sure what it was. Fanni didn't get a biopsy since she was pregnant. "The pregnancy made everything more complicated because they couldn't do the tests right away," she says.

Then again, three weeks later, Fanni found herself with a chronic cough, but this time, was unable to walk or eat. "I knew something was wrong," Fanni says. She went to her doctor, who advised her to go to the emergency room and noted that her symptoms were related to something in her brain. "I couldn't move my left leg and had weakness on my left side," she says.

Her cough persisted, she had difficulty breathing, and felt lumps in her neck. "My symptoms progressed very rapidly. One day, I felt a small lump, and one week later, they felt much larger," she said.



Tina Basenese, MA, APN, ACHPN

Fanni received a brain radiation treatment and started palliative care immediately. She also underwent one round of chemotherapy,

and then was given a medication called TAGRISSO, which is a prescription medicine approved as a first-in-line treatment for stage 4 NSCLC with certain EGFR mutations. Her oncologist, Dr. Ronnen, referred her to Nurse Practitioner Tina Basenese, a Palliative Care provider at Astera, for palliative and supportive care. Tina helped Fanni manage her chronic cough, fatigue, and anxiety symptoms.

"The palliative care helped me to enjoy the last part of my pregnancy and my son's birth," Fanni says. Basenese also helped Fanni with pain management and insomnia after her son was born. Her symptoms significantly improved throughout her palliative care treatment. "Tina is always positive and makes me feel like I can continue with this. Palliative care helped me manage my symptoms so I could live a better life and enjoy my life outside of cancer," she says.

Less than a month after Fanni started treatment, her son Daniel was born at 34 weeks. Her doctors asked her to deliver early since her treatment caused her to lose amniotic fluid surrounding the baby. Fanni had a C-section the same day she received the news and says, "I was so happy to see my son. He was born at 3 pounds, 13 ounces." Her son spent three weeks in the NICU since he was born premature and wasn't eating on his own, although he was healthy overall.

After Daniel was born, Fanni's cancer started to shrink, her cough improved, and the lumps on her neck disappeared. Although Fanni still has cancer, she has responded very well to the TAGRISSO, continues to take this medication daily, and gets better each day.

Fanni was working as a nurse at a community outpatient clinic when she received her diagnosis. "I loved

working here and helping my Spanish community," she says. She stopped working to focus on her recovery and raise her son. Family has been a huge source of support for Fanni throughout her cancer journey. "I have a very supportive husband," she says. Fanni's belief in God and praying has also brought her peace.

This experience has changed Fanni's perspective on life. "Now I'm focusing every day on enjoying life—enjoying time with my baby, husband, and family. I'm grateful to God and the people who have been there by my side—the doctors and the nurses. There have been little things I've taken for granted in the past, but now I enjoy every little thing. I continue to pray to God every day. Life is beautiful, even though I have this condition," she says.

Seeing her son grow up is a huge source of inspiration for Fanni. She remains positive and dedicated to living. She takes each day as it comes and is optimistic about advancements in the medical field. "I won't give up. It's not the end. It's the beginning of a new phase of your life," she fearlessly says.

Preventative Power:

How to Protect Yourself from the Sun Year-Round



Seeta Trivedi, MD

Sun safety is important year-round due to inevitable exposure to radiation from the sun regardless of what season we're in. Even in the winter, sunlight reflects off the white snow onto our skin. This is why taking measures to protect our skin from this radiation damage as a preventive step to combat skin cancer is important.

"Our body is constantly facing some amount of sun exposure on a daily basis. Skin cancers happen because of a lifetime cumulative exposure to radiation," says Medical Oncologist and Hematologist Dr. Seeta Trivedi. "The

important thing is that prevention is always better than cure. This is the advice I give to my patients on a day-to-day basis."

Dr. Trivedi stresses the importance of protecting your skin from the sun when exposed to or spending an extended period of time outdoors. Some ways to protect your skin include wearing sunscreen with a minimum SPF 50, wearing a wide-brimmed hat to cover your head and neck, wearing sunglasses that block UV rays, and choosing long-sleeved shirts and pants when possible. Tanning bed use, a family history of skin cancers, and fair/freckled skin or red-haired individuals may also be at higher risk.

"Skin cancer is a cancer that you can see. If you see something that looks unusual, say something and talk to your doctor about it," Dr. Trivedi says. "If there is something that hasn't healed or resolved in two to

four weeks, certainly have a dermatologist check it out."

According to the American Cancer Society, skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S. Although melanoma accounts for only 1% of skin cancers, it is by far the most aggressive form of skin cancer.

Astera offers melanoma and other advanced skin cancer treatments in all its offices. For metastatic melanomas, dual immunotherapy treatment is generally employed as the first line of therapy. Metastatic melanoma is an advanced form of melanoma that has spread to other parts of the body. Dual Immunotherapy with drugs such as Ipilimumab, Pembrolizumab and Nivolumab are used to treat metastatic melanoma and can be used to treat metastatic or stage 4 cancer and can reduce the risk of recurrence for locally advanced melanomas following surgical resection.



Astera Cancer Care also offers genetic mutational testing on cancer cells to determine options for targeted therapies, using tools such as Foundation One testing and Guardant360 testing. These tests are used to find additional targeted mutations that could be used to treat metastatic melanoma, such as mutations in the BRAF or MEK genes, which, if found, can be targeted via oral agents.

"Cancer care requires a multidisciplinary team of specialists to achieve an optimal outcome. For patients who come to Astera Cancer Care, we work alongside their dermatologist, Mohs Surgeon, radiation oncologist and primary care physician to provide the best care to the patient," says Dr. Trivedi.

Skin checks are an important way to look out for potential lesions that could be cancerous. Abnormalities like scaly red patches, open

sores, small scabs that don't heal, scabs with recurrent bleeding, skin bumpiness, or moles that change shape and color should be carefully observed to ensure they resolve or heal. Common locations on the body for skin cancer include the face, scalp, ears, back of the neck, arms, shins, and less frequent locations include the palms, soles of feet, and underneath the nail beds.

"I tell patients to constantly keep an eye on how their skin looks when they look in the mirror, and if they see any new moles or lesions, then that should certainly require a check sooner," she says.

When checking for melanomas, we use certain characteristics to identify more serious lesions. ABCDE is a simple key to remember and stands for asymmetry,

border, color, diameter, and evolution. 'A' or asymmetry means the lesion is not a round spot or mole but an irregularly shaped lesion. 'B' stands for border. Lesions without a smooth border but a jagged and uneven border are generally suspicious. 'C' stands for color, meaning the mole is not one uniform shade; it seems to have different colors or areas of lighter or darker shades. 'D' stands for the mole's diameter, a spot greater than 5 mm, or a pencil eraser. 'E' stands for any evolution of the mole with a recent change in its appearance.

Doctors commonly use the 'ABCDE' key during skin checks. If a spot is worrisome, a dermatologist's office biopsy can help determine whether it is serious.

Sources:

American Cancer Society: [About Melanoma Skin Cancer](#)
 American Cancer Society: [Immunotherapy for Melanoma Skin Cancer](#)
 National Institute of Health: [Immunotherapy in Melanoma: Recent Advances and Future Directions](#)

2024 STAFF RETREAT

Our staff retreat at the Hyatt Regency Princeton, which took place on Saturday, March 2, was a resounding success with a remarkable turnout of 208 physicians and staff members. The event brought together not only the Astera team but also welcomed attendees from our new team at Solara. The day was filled with presentations, starting with Selinza Mitchell, RN, who shared insights on "The Art of Active Listening: Communicating Emotionally Charged or Difficult News." President Dr. Bruno S. Fang provided a comprehensive year-in-review and unveiled the exciting plans for 2024.

Special recognitions were bestowed as Danielle Buckler and Patty Tapia, Senior Development Managers from the American Cancer Society, expressed heartfelt gratitude, presented plaques, and displayed a banner in acknowledgment of Astera's active participation in the 2023 Strides Walks in Edison and Jersey City. Dr. Michael J. Nissenblatt enriched the clinical knowledge of the attendees with a compelling Clinical Education talk on "Finding Hope," earning clinical staff valuable CMEs.

At the retreat, we showcased a touching Patient Testimonial video (see QR code on the next page), where nine patients shared their heartfelt gratitude,

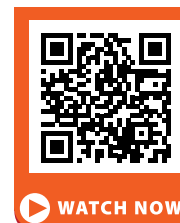


highlighting the remarkable difference made by Astera's dedicated team. Additionally, we honored our staff members with Years of Service Awards, recognizing their commitment ranging from 5 to 30 years. Each awardee received a certificate, a lapel pin, and a thoughtful token of appreciation, such as a monetary gift or a gift card.

The day included team-building activities that brought laughter and camaraderie, therapy dogs, snacks, photo booths, and massage chairs, creating a relaxed atmosphere.

The highlight of the day was a Scavenger Hunt featuring 50 items, including creative tasks such as spelling out "Astera" with bodies and capturing group photos with Dr. Fang. The Somerset location reviewed the honor of bringing the trophy home for their outstanding performance. This trophy will be a cherished symbol to be passed on at future annual retreats.

Dr. Fang closed the event with gratitude, emphasizing the theme of the day, "**Celebrating You.**" The retreat truly celebrated and thanked every member of the Astera and Solara teams for their unwavering dedication and the exceptional care they provide to our patients. The day was a perfect blend of education, recognition, and team-building, setting a positive tone for Astera Cancer Care and Solara Health's future endeavors.



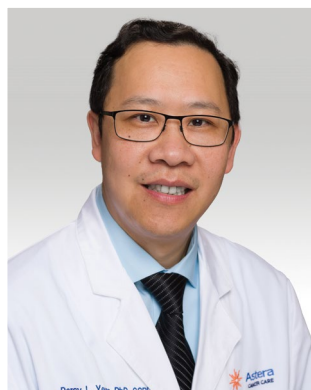
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Astera Cancer Care Introduces ALPHA3 Clinical Trial: An Innovative Approach to CAR T Cell Therapy



Percy L. Yeung, PhD, CCRP

Astera Cancer Care has collaborated with Allogene Therapeutics to revolutionize the landscape of CAR T cell therapy, particularly for patients with Large B-Cell Lymphoma (LBCL). This partnership is poised

to significantly improve patient outcomes by providing a faster and more accessible treatment option through the innovative ALPHA3 clinical trial.

The ALPHA3 clinical trial targets patients with LBCL who have completed and responded to their initial chemotherapy. The trial has recently completed its site initiation visit. Astera Cancer Care proudly served as one of the first sites opened in the United States. Broader participation in the trial is anticipated to begin before the end of the summer. Astera Cancer Care has identified its first candidate and is potentially preparing to consent its first patient, marking a pivotal step forward in this innovative treatment approach.

While effective, traditional CAR T cell therapy presents several challenges for patients. CAR

T cell therapy involves using the patient's own T cells, which must first be collected through a process known as apheresis. Following collection, the T cells are sent to a specialized facility where they are genetically modified to become CAR T cells. This entire process, from collection to re-infusion, can take up

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to eight weeks. In most cases, patients often need to travel to specialized centers for both apheresis and subsequent treatment, adding to the burden of their already taxing health conditions.

In contrast, Allogene's approach uses T cells from healthy donors, eliminating the need

for apheresis and the lengthy manufacturing process associated with traditional CAR T therapy. Instead, the CAR T cells are pre-manufactured and readily available, reducing the time patients must wait to receive treatment.

"I have watched with interest the acceleration of CAR T research in LBCL, but because most patients live more than 2 hours from the nearest treatment center, it's not feasible for them to participate," said Dr. Edward J. Licitra, MD, PhD, Chief Executive Officer of Astera Cancer Care. "Having access to an 'off-the-shelf' CAR T product with a manageable safety profile changes that equation dramatically for me, and my patients."

The ALPHA3 trial's design focuses on minimal residual disease (MRD) testing, which involves monitoring circulating tumor DNA in the blood to assess the presence of residual disease. Patients who exhibit a complete or partial response after initial treatments undergo MRD testing to determine their risk of recurrence. Those identified as MRD-positive may receive CAR T cell therapy within one month, a significantly shorter timeframe compared to traditional methods.

The Phase 2 ALPHA3 trial represents an advancement in treating large B-cell lymphoma (LBCL). Over 60,000 patients are expected to be treated for LBCL annually in the US, EU, and UK. While first-line (1L) R-CHOP or other chemoimmunotherapy regimens are effective for most patients, approximately 30% will relapse and require subsequent treatment.

The ALPHA3 trial is designed to screen patients at high risk for relapse after 1L treatment using an ultra-sensitive investigational MRD technology (CLARITY™ powered by PhasED-Seq™, Foresight Diagnostics). Cema-cel, the investigational CAR T cell product, is administered as a one-time infusion immediately upon detection of MRD following six cycles of R-CHOP or another standard 1L chemoimmunotherapy regimen. This approach positions cema-cel as the "7th cycle" of frontline treatment for eligible patients with MRD, aiming to improve 1L cure rates in LBCL.

The trial will be conducted across various cancer treatment centers, including community cancer centers, where most earlier-line patients seek care. This randomized study will enroll approximately 240 patients and aim to demonstrate improvement in event-free survival (EFS) compared to the current standard of care, which is observation.

"Off-the-shelf CAR T products will allow for greater access to cutting-edge technologies for patients in their local communities, and this will improve outcomes for many more cancer patients," Dr. Licitra added. "We are excited to help define a new treatment standard in LBCL."

This trial exemplifies Astera Cancer Care's dedication to integrating advanced therapies into community oncology practice, ensuring that cutting-edge treatments are accessible to all patients. The importance of research and clinical trials cannot be overstated, as they are crucial for delivering advanced therapies that improve patient outcomes.

Patient Reviews

“After nearly 5 years of cancer treatment, I feel like a beloved and treasured member of a family.”

“From beginning to end, my experience with Astera was fantastic. The staff was friendly and courteous and Doctor Lampert was amazing. He took the time needed to answer all of our questions and did so without rushing. I was very impressed with the care I received and would absolutely recommend their services.”

“Dr. is great. Facility is remarkable. Staff are helpful and friendly.”

“I have been in cancer trials for almost 3 years and Carina has been an ace in every aspect. She is professional, caring and efficient. She solves all problems and makes my journey easier. I hope she is appreciated by the team at Astera. I feel privileged to have them on my side.”

“Considering the circumstances under which I had to visit this facility, my experience was extraordinary. Everyone was kind, caring, and considerate. I am so thankful that my primary care physician recommended Dr. Lisa Hopkins to me. She's compassionate and explained everything in great detail. My mind is at ease knowing that I am in good hands, which was a concern of mine. Thank you, Dr. Hopkins, keep doing what you do!!”

“More than a patient, Dr. Zaman treats me like family. He explained everything about my treatment in a way I can understand. Always looking after my wellbeing. For sure, I'm still alive due to Dr. Zaman. He is a great doctor, and above all a Great Human.”

“Dr. Patel was recommended to me by my PCP. He was clear and thorough in his explanations. Very empathetic while also being very knowledgeable. The staff is welcome and friendly--from the front desk to the phlebotomist.”

“I have been under Dr. Philip Reid's care for over two years at Astera Cancer Care. Been there for a total of four years and everyone there is great. Knowledgeable, personable, compassionate and competent from Dr. Phil to the infusion and injection nurses, the receptionist to the lab and vitals nurses. I can't say enough about them. I am so thankful I chose them four years ago!”

“Dr. Lee & care team are friendly, very informative & efficient.”

“Great service and greatness.”

“Dr. Khalid is excellent. She takes her time and listens to what you have to say. Explains things so you can understand. Astera's staff is top-notch, from intake to the lab to the nurses. Been a patient since 2017.”

“The facility, staff and physician were absolutely amazing. It is a very welcoming and inviting atmosphere. I definitely would recommend Dr. Sachs to anyone.”

“The entire team at Astera East Brunswick is Amazing. From the front desk to nurses in the infusion suite, nurses in the lab, and Dr. Salwitz, they have all provided me with excellent care. Dr. Salwitz is the most caring and professional doctor that I've ever experienced. He is also a wealth of knowledge and an expert in medicine in general. Thank you all!!”

“Dr. Trivedi has been there for me through so much. I was hospitalized recently on three different occasions, and she and her team were there for me and made sure I was getting everything I needed. I am forever grateful.”

“My overall experience was the best. Everyone was very good at what they do. My Dr. is the best. The receptionist and the nurse who did the blood work were very pleasant. Thank you again.”

“Dr. Young has provided me with compassionate care for 12 years. He's the best. GOD BLESS HIM. The nursing staff are excellent. Love all of them.”

“Dr. Amjad seems to really care about finding answers. He comes to the appointment prepared and gives his undivided attention to the issues at hand. He is comfortable to talk with. The staff seem lovely and caring. I look forward to working with everyone.”

Upcoming Virtual Programs

7/15/24 : Cancer & Body Image



Facilitated by: **Sharon Zarate, LCSW**

Cancer and its treatments may cause changes to your body's appearance and function. These changes can cause you to change the way you feel about yourself and experience your body. Join us for an information session on how cancer and treatments can affect your self esteem and body image; learn how to think differently about your body and feel better about yourself.

1:00pm

8/12/24: Memory Loss & Cancer



Facilitated by: **ReVital and Neshama Marcus, LCSW, OSW-C**

Cancer and its treatments may cause changes in: Attention and Focus, Thinking and Processing, Memory and Recall, Orientation, Decision Making and Problem Solving. Learn about changes in memory and what you can do to improve memory and brain function.

1:00pm

9/16/24: Sex, Intimacy & Cancer



Facilitated by: **ReVital and Sharon Zarate, LCSW**

Cancer and its treatment may affect your sexual health including: Motivation, Interest, Sexual Functioning. This session will focus on understanding importance of sexual health, strategies to initiate conversations about sexual health, and resources to help you overcome limitations and reach your potential.

1:00pm

10/14/24: Finding Your Purpose



Facilitated by: **Sharlynn Flores, LCSW**

While living with a cancer diagnosis, you may experience: Functional loss, Shifts in household roles and/or work responsibilities, Identity confusion. These changes can leave you asking about your sense of purpose or motivation to continue fighting. Learn some strategies to reignite or find your sense of purpose and live a more fulfilling life.

1:00pm

11/11/24 : Hospital Transitions



Facilitated by: **Neshama Marcus, LCSW, OSW-C**

Sometimes we unexpectedly find ourselves moving from hospital setting to: Rehab, Skilled Nursing, Assisted Living, Independent Living Home without proper supports in place, full understanding of these settings, and ramifications for our decisions. Learn how to do your research, get prepared, and make difficult decisions after discharge.

1:00pm

12/9/24: Combatting Loneliness



Facilitated by: **Sharon Zarate, LCSW**

Getting a cancer diagnosis can be isolating or make you feel detached from other people in your life. It is perfectly normal and natural to feel lonely, even when you are with other people or people you love. Learn strategies to find connection throughout your cancer journey (before, during and long after your cancer treatments).

1:00pm



Neshama Marcus, LCSW, OSW-C



To register for upcoming virtual programs, scan QR Code or visit: asteracancercare.org

Locations

Medical Oncology

Bridgewater

P: 732-390-7750

1200 US Highway 22 East - 3rd Floor, Bridgewater, NJ 08807

East Brunswick

P: 732-390-7750

629 Cranbury Road - 2nd Floor, East Brunswick, NJ 08816

Edgewater

P: 732-390-7750

1829 Hudson Park Edgewater NJ 07020

GPS: 235 Old River Road Edgewater, NJ 07020

Edison

P: 732-390-7750

3 Progress Street - Suite 100, Edison, NJ 08820

Jersey City

P: 732-390-7750

1 Exchange Place, Jersey City, NJ 07302

Monroe Township

P: 732-390-7750

9 Centre Drive - Suite 100, Monroe Township, NJ 08831

Robbinsville

P: 732-390-7750

1 Washington Boulevard - Suite 9, Robbinsville, NJ 08691

Rutherford

P: 732-390-7750

201 RT 17 North - FL 11, Rutherford, NJ 07070

Somerset

P: 732-390-7750

75 Veronica Avenue - Suite 201, Somerset, NJ 08873



Joshua Oderanti, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, PMHNP-BC

Locations

Radiation Oncology

Darby

Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital Department of Radiation Oncology

P: 610-237-4370

1500 Lansdowne Avenue - Medical Science Building, Lower Level - Darby, PA 19023

Flemington

Hunterdon Regional Cancer Center Department of Radiation Oncology

P: 908-788-6514

2100 Wescott Drive, Flemington, NJ 08822

Freehold

CentraState Medical Center Department of Radiation Oncology

P: 732-303-5290

901 West Main Street, Freehold, NJ 07728

Langhorne

St. Mary Regional Cancer Center Department of Radiation Oncology

P: 215-710-5300

1201 Langhorne-Newtown Road, Langhorne, PA 19047

Monroe Township

P: 609-655-5755

9 Centre Drive - Suite 115, Monroe Township, NJ 08831

New Brunswick - Saint Peter's University Hospital

P: 732-745-8590

215 Easton Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Plainsboro

Penn Medicine Princeton Medical Center Department of Radiation Oncology

P: 609-853-6770

1 Plainsboro Road, Plainsboro, NJ 08536

Somerset

ProCure Proton Therapy Center

P: 732-357-2600

103 Cedar Grove Lane, Somerset, NJ 08873

Locations

Breast Surgery

Edgewater

P: 732-390-7750

1829 Hudson Park Edgewater NJ 07020

GPS: 235 Old River Road Edgewater, NJ 07020

Jersey City

P: 732-390-7750

1 Exchange Place, Jersey City, NJ 07302

Monroe Township

P: 732-390-7750

9 Centre Drive, Suite 100, Monroe Township, NJ 08831

New Brunswick

The Breast Center Saint Peter's University Hospital

P: 732-846-3300

CARES Building 240 Easton Avenue, 3rd Floor, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Rutherford

P: 732-390-7750

201 RT 17 North, FL 11, Rutherford, NJ 07070



Darren Sachs, DO and Melissa Cruz, LPN, OPN-CG, Manager of Surgical Services



OUR PATIENTS & THEIR FAMILIES MATTER

Our patients and their families tell the story of overcoming cancer like no other. They help us connect, inspire, and empower. If you know a patient or have a family member who would like to make an impact and share their experience with us, please have them contact dorothy.ballweg@asterahealthcare.org.

