



A Community Partnership In Care

Every patient treated with protons has a unique life story. Staff at the James M. Slater, MD Proton Treatment & Research Center are well aware of this, and treat each patient with the respect the person deserves. In doing so, the staff are following a principle laid down many years ago by Dr. Slater: *"Treat patients as though they are members of your own family."*

One Patient's Story

From time to time, a patient comes along who really is a member of the family. In the case of Richard Garner, the "family" relationship exists on three levels: he is a former employee of Loma Linda University Medical Center (LLUMC), he and his wife, Grace, are members of LLUMC's community partners and he is a neighbor who lives a few blocks from the Medical Center. Mr. and Mrs. Garner, whom everyone at LLUMC knows as Dick and Gracie, have a long history with the LLUMC community and with proton therapy.

After serving in the Air Force for 20 years, Dick retired in June 1976, and began working at LLUMC the next month, initially as manager for employment and recruitment. He became executive director of human resource management for LLU and LLUMC in 1989, serving in this capacity until retiring in 2001. Most of those years, Gracie worked part time in community relations and public affairs at LLUMC.

In March 2009, Dick was diagnosed

with prostate cancer. He had no doubt that he wanted proton therapy. Dick's situation was unusual in that he previously had two total hip replacements. His physician, David A. Bush, M.D., told him that although most patients are treated with beams aimed at the prostate from each side, through the hips, the precision of the proton beam enabled him to devise an alternative plan. The plan was successful, Dick completed his course on June 11, 2009, and reported minimal side effects, mainly some burning when urinating, controlled by taking 2-3 doses of ibuprofen daily, and some fatigue toward the end of the treatment course. However, Dick says, "I still did yard work and pursued all my normal activities."

Dick is enthusiastic about his experience. "It was a true blessing to receive care from such dedicated staff from day to day," he said, and added, "In all the years I worked at LLUMC, I never thought that one day I would receive proton treatment for prostate cancer, but you never know." He went on, "One thing I learned about the proton center as a patient that I did not know as an employee or community partner is the tremendous dedication of all the staff involved in my treatments. The doctors, nurses, radiation technologists and all behind the scenes do an exceptional job with each patient, and that's not just what I say. That same thought was voiced by many patients that I was acquainted with while going through the program."

Similar thoughts often are expressed by many patients receiving treatment in the department, and by their family members. It is common for staff to receive thanks, often accompanied by expressions of gratitude for the way patients and families are treated. The maxim, to "treat patients as though they are members of your own family," is followed constantly at the James M. Slater, MD Proton Treatment & Research Center. Fittingly, the community partners, like an extended family, make an important contribution to this vital effort.

Partnering with the Community

The term, community partners, refers to the department of radiation medicine's network of people and businesses in Loma Linda, Redlands and other nearby communities who help meet patients' needs. As far back as 1985, Dick and Gracie Garner would occasionally make their cottage available to patients visiting LLUMC from out of town at their nearby home. In the early 1990s, as more and more patients



Mr. and Mrs. Richard Garner

began coming to Loma Linda from distant places, Dick and Gracie decided to make the cottage available to patients only.

In the early 1990s, the department of radiation medicine began taking steps to meet the needs of people who were beginning to come to LLUMC for proton therapy. Housing was the most pressing need and the department began compiling a list of places where patients and their families might stay. It quickly became apparent, however, that housing was only the beginning. Patients receiving proton therapy might need to be near the hospital for periods ranging from a few days to a few months, and because most patients experienced few or no side effects, they had a good deal of free time to explore southern California.

The department began assembling other lists such as: local dining establishments, nearby places of worship, transportation alternatives, nearby beaches and mountains information and other places of recreation. Programs were also added to make the patient and family feel “at home” in the Medical Center, such as support groups for patients with prostate cancer, a group for breast cancer, lung cancer and other tumors. There is also a restaurant tour group for patients who meet regularly to share a meal at a local eatery, and regular tours of the proton facility.

Staff interview potential community partners before including them on the housing or restaurant lists, to ensure that partners understand the needs of patients and families. Many landlords undertake special attempts to make their properties suitable for patients.

Department of Radiation Medicine and the Community

Attempts to smooth the way for patients begin even before the patient comes to Loma Linda. The department is unique in that a registered nurse takes calls in the referral office. From the outset, patients and families speak with a person knowledgeable about all aspects of the patient experience. The nursing referral team also has an insurance appeals registered nurse coordinator, who is a helpful service for patients seeking help when appealing to their insurance provider. The follow-up team keeps in touch with patients once treatment is completed. In addition to partnering with the community, the department conducts a series of regular meetings and orientation events for new and ongoing patients and their families.

These include a Tuesday support group for those with advanced prostate cancer, a Wednesday afternoon group for all those with prostate cancer, and a Wednesday evening educational and support group for all cancer patients being treated with protons. A Thursday

support group for spouses and caregivers is conducted by Mildred Saravia-Guzman, MSW. “A stress-reduction group is being planned,” states Carol Davis, Psy.D., Dr.P.H., RTT, who conducts some of these groups. Nutritional counselling is provided for individual patients by Stella Jones, R.D.

next town or across the country.

For example, the Drayson Center (a world class fitness center) is available to patients, whom are encouraged to use it three to five times a week unless their physicians suggest otherwise. Also, during the educational/support group meetings,



The community of care goes far beyond the walls of the LLU Medical Center.

“Programs such as these,” states J. Lynn Martell, D.Min., director of special services, “help build a sense of community within and connect with the community without.” The community partners play a major role. Dr. Martell points out, “The community partners contribute so much to the success of our patients’ treatments.” Dr. Martell is active in more than overseeing several programs and the prostate support group: every year, he and his wife, Karen, open their home on Christmas day and invite all proton patients who are in treatment over the holidays to join them for a catered Christmas dinner.

According to Dr. Martell, the support groups, beginning with the patient orientation meeting, begin with the observation that, although treatments take place in the gantries or the fixed-beam room, healing is a process—much more than just showing up for treatment. Loma Linda is a faith-based institution and has the undergirding philosophy “to make man whole”—mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. *This commitment to whole-person care with an emphasis on health sets the experience of the patient treated at Loma Linda apart from any other proton center.* Besides the various support groups, many components are intentionally designed to help enhance the patient experience whether the patient lives locally, in the

patients hear many local physicians and professors speak on health and nutritional topics such as building a strong immune system, anti-aging strategies, diet, nutrition and exercise. Also available is a series called Life, Faith and Cancer. All these factors have helped to make the Loma Linda community a Blue Zone of longevity.

It Takes a Community

All of these services are available to all patients, local as well as those travelling to Loma Linda from far away. Although the various internal support groups and programs are important, the department of radiation medicine appreciates the vital role played by LLUMC community partners. Yolanda Magana, service line director for the department, notes the crucial role community partners play in helping to make proton therapy a reality for local and out-of-town patients. “We often express our appreciation to these people for partnering with us,” she says. “Some have been doing it for many years. Many patients travel from across the state and country, and around the world, to be treated for cancer. It is an extremely stressful time in their lives. Partners provide a ‘home away from home’ for them. It helps immeasurably in providing an atmosphere for them to have a good patient experience.”