

## CASE STUDY

# AON Partnership Means Expanding Community-Based Cancer Care Throughout Arizona

## ABOUT CANCER & BLOOD SPECIALISTS OF ARIZONA

Cancer & Blood Specialists of Arizona (CBSA) is a community-based medical oncology, gynecologic oncology, and hematology practice providing treatment for patients diagnosed with all types of cancer and blood disorders. Its experienced physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, and clinical support staff deliver compassionate, patient-centered, community-based care throughout the greater Phoenix, Arizona, and surrounding areas.

When it was established in March 2021 in partnership with American Oncology Network (AON), it pledged to serve patients within the communities in which they live. As such, CBSA's physicians have and maintain deep roots throughout greater Phoenix. In addition, its physicians possess more than 40 years of collective experience delivering the highest quality cancer treatment based on cutting-edge research and outcomes.

## THE CHALLENGE: SYNCHRONIZING A PRACTICE POISED FOR GROWTH

CBSA is the passion project of four highly skilled, expertly trained, community-minded yet very busy physicians. The care they provide helped to quickly build a loyal base of patients and an effective community practice. Its physician founders left a large healthcare setting to establish a group dedicated to community minded care – a vision that was brought to life with the support of AON.

The practice rapidly expanded, and two physicians were soon added to help meet the needs of patients in its three offices. Along with its focus

on community-mindedness, CBSA leadership maintains a focus on expanding the practice's footprint to provide patients with a meaningful alternative to hospital-based care. Continuing to achieve these goals requires overcoming several challenges. In addition to geographic hurdles, expansion means adding providers, securing additional patients, identifying communities that will benefit from CBSA's services, and opening new locations. Its partnership with AON plays a key role in meeting these goals.

"With AON as a practice partner,

we can provide our patients more streamlined, comprehensive care regardless of where they live in Arizona," said Shana Wingo, MD, a Board-certified gynecologic oncologist with CBSA.

Before coming together under the AON umbrella, however, CBSA leaders independently sought ways to achieve their goals and objectives for the new practice. Ultimately, consensus was achieved on AON.

"Each of the physicians was looking



- Established 2021
- Seven physicians
- Four advanced practitioners
- Four locations

at different opportunities, which led us to circle and come together and discuss a plan forward. I looked at a hospital system to see if having a more significant footprint might allow for better integration of services. The others tried to identify viable growth

strategies,” said Dr. Wingo. “Ultimately, as physicians, we found that by partnering with AON we can continue to maintain our autonomy without being managed by a hospital system. “In AON,” she continued, “we found a partner that allows for an

independent approach to operations, physician leadership and practice growth – including how they address practice autonomy and allow for local-based decision-making ability. That approach was not what other partnership models offered.”

## THE SOLUTION: PHYSICIAN-LED, PATIENT-CENTRIC CARE FROM A GROWTH PARTNER

AON quickly streamlined many of CBSA’s business and care processes through collaboration, which is at the heart of all things medically and administratively at the practice. There are no corporate mandates. Instead, they gained a patient-centric, medically focused healthcare group that is part of a larger organization that knows how to help practices expand into new communities in the manner that CBSA’s leadership initially sought, said Dr. Wingo.

AON’s approach to business, leadership, and growth is highly efficient, forward-thinking, and proactive, said Tania Cortas, MD, CPE, a Board-certified medical oncologist and hematologist with CBSA. “They have been on top of everything and been very proactive in making sure everything is done correctly. Like all

transitions we’ve had our challenges but overall it’s been a good experience for us thus far.”

She continued: “Phoenix is a unique market because there are some academic medical centers, but never a major established center. The patients here also don’t want to drive a long distance to get care, so it was imperative to work with a partner that lets us meet patients where they are. AON has been able to create a niche market in that regard, working with a lot of smaller practices that are widely distributed, which is beneficial for our patient population.”

A widely distributed model also means CBSA can expand beyond the urban core it currently serves to reach patients throughout Arizona – an original goal of practice leadership.

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**Tania Cortas, MD, CPE**  
Cancer & Blood Specialists of Arizona



## THE OUTCOMES: AON TAKES CARE OF OUR BUSINESS SO WE CAN FOCUS ON PATIENTS

Local group leadership already is seeing a pronounced uptick in the number of patients served – by as much as 60% since March 2021. AON and CBSA are working together to keep up with the many changes in oncology, including clinical trial updates, medication availability, and accessing medicines that were previously out of reach to many patients in other areas of care.

“AON has some ancillary services that are exceptional, including nutrition support and the in-house

pharmacy, which provides door-to-door delivery to the patients,” Dr. Wingo said. “These benefits allow for better, more patient-centric care.

“AON is helping us move the needle. We can focus on being physicians first, caring for our patients without continuously dealing with the business of medicine. It makes it better for everyone when that business relationship works so nicely.”

“If you need help, they’re available. All these resources are just a phone call away. It’s a nice change to have the accessibility available to our leadership staff as well,” she added.



**Shana Wingo, MD**  
Cancer & Blood Specialists of Arizona

## THE FUTURE: EXPANDING PERSONALIZED CARE THROUGHOUT ARIZONA

CBSA Flagstaff, a new office, recently opened in in January 2022. Other locations are also being planned across the state. The group also added additional providers to respond to patient demand.

As new surgeons and alternative oncology specialists join CBSA, they do so with a shared understanding of the organization’s mission and call to community service through community-based care. In addition, as CBSA accesses more of AON’s services and support, practice leadership expects to see it reflected in the practice’s bottom line – while also paving the way for more growth and additional patient care options.



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