

CASE STUDY

AON Partnership Empowers Hope Cancer Care of Nevada to Achieve its Mission of Providing Patient-Centered Care

ABOUT HOPE CANCER CARE

Hope Cancer Care of Nevada was established in 2009 by Raja S. Mehdi, MD, a Board-certified medical oncologist to provide state-of-the-art cancer treatment and personally tailored programs designed to put the body, mind, and spirit at ease as it heals. Since then, the center has expanded to two locations where Dr. Mehdi, two nurse practitioners and 18 support staff provide comprehensive and personalized care to every patient.

Hope Cancer Care's mission of treating the whole patient is complemented by its philosophy combining leading medical treatments with the ability to focus solely on patients' recovery – an approach that allows Hope Cancer Care's highly trained staff to craft individualized treatment programs for each patient.

THE CHALLENGE: PROHIBITIVE COSTS, COMPLEX RELATIONSHIPS

As business and care models evolved over the years, oncology practices like Hope Cancer Care of Nevada faced a growing number of increasingly complex obstacles that threatened their ability to remain independent. Among the most challenging were the cost of oncology drugs – biologics in particular – and managing relationships with insurance companies.

“Procurement of drugs was becoming almost prohibitive for smaller practices. And then, even if you managed to acquire the drugs for your patients, you had the complexities and headaches of dealing with insurance companies,” said Dr. Mehdi. “So those two main

issues led us to look for a practice management partner.”

The decision to seek out a network partner presented another challenge – finding the right philosophical fit. Dr. Mehdi noted that many networks had immediate disqualifiers, including being backed or owned by pharmaceutical or insurance companies.

“In my mind, those types of networks were not truly patient-centered,” he said. “They probably provide good care, but philosophically, it was not a good match for us.”



- Established 2009
- One physician
- Two advanced practitioners
- Two locations



THE SOLUTION: A PHYSICIAN-LED, PATIENT-CENTRIC PARTNER

Dr. Mehdi quickly determined that American Oncology Network (AON) checked all of Hope Cancer Care of Nevada's partnership boxes and joined the network in 2019. His decision was validated from the start, when his team flew to Florida to meet with AON's leadership.

“It was very attractive to me that the person at the helm is a physician who is still seeing patients and is still heavily engaged in patient care. They are obviously patient-centered,” said Dr. Mehdi.

One of the primary attractions of AON was its promise to let Hope Cancer Care's physicians continue to practice oncology in the manner they feel is best for their patients – a promise that Dr. Mehdi says he sees no signs of being broken in the long-term.

Equally important, AON fulfilled another key requirement for Hope Cancer Care in that the benefits also extended to the non-clinical side of the house. Streamlined processes have helped ease administrative burdens, allowing the practice to keep pace with the rapidly evolving healthcare landscape.

“The way that AON helped us navigate the changes made joining the network almost seamless,” said Practice Manager Caprice Walder. “And now,

there is less on my plate, which allows me to focus on other priorities. I feel so much more invested in everything. With the oncology and drug landscape constantly changing, it's such a relief to have the AON resources behind us, to take on the majority of that for us and guide us. I can't put into words how valuable that is.”

Dr. Mehdi says he also benefits from the business resources AON brings to the table. His attention is no longer divided between patient care and human resources, procurement and other activities that fall outside the clinical scope.

“It's like I just became a real doctor all over again. I can stay completely focused on the patient because half my mind is no longer occupied with administrative issues,” he said. “We are able to function more efficiently as individuals and be even more patient-centered than before. With AON, we may not do everything the same as before, but at the end of the day the compass is pointing toward the patient.”

Walder adds that, since the merger with AON, the staff has the time, tools and other resources to really put the patient first – something she says is “so refreshing. We've had nothing but positive reviews from patients who came with us through the merger. All the way around, the best part is how patient centered it is and how it has enabled us to do that wholeheartedly – not just with the best of intentions.”

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Raja S. Mehdi, MD
Hope Cancer Care of Nevada

THE OUTCOMES: ENHANCED SERVICES AND HAPPY PATIENTS

AON has opened numerous doors for Hope Cancer Care of Nevada with opportunities to provide expanded services that align well with its mission of patient-centric, whole-person care. One of those is AON's full-service centralized specialty pharmacy. Hope Cancer Care patients benefit not only from rapid access to cutting-edge medications, but also from in-home delivery of their prescriptions in just days.

Patients frequently provide positive feedback, often focused on the outreach undertaken by the AON pharmacy team – even when that communication is to share that they are unable to fill a particular prescription.

“They’re always communicating with the patient, letting them know why and where they must transfer the prescription, giving the patient all the information needed to connect with that new pharmacy,” said Walder. “Our AON representative is always in contact with me and looking at our numbers to make sure I’m not having any problems with any part of the pharmacy service, which is just great.”

The ability to enhance lab services was also a huge benefit for Hope Cancer Care. Though their license exempts

them from having full laboratory capabilities, the ability to offer patients on-site draws rather than sending them to a laboratory service provider is a significant convenience.

Another value-add program is AON's Referral Base Management Program, which provides the structure and support needed for an effective physician liaison.

Despite their best efforts and intentions, previous attempts to implement a referral management program had fallen short. AON's template has made all the difference.

“We were able to tap into AON's experience, knowledge and expertise, which was significant. We are already starting to see results” even though the program is still in its early stages, said Dr. Mehdi.

One of the most immediate benefits Hope Cancer Care realized from its partnership with AON came at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. While many healthcare organizations were scrambling for supplies and figuring out how to continue providing patient care safely, AON was disseminating protocols, cleaning and disinfecting supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) to all its practices.

“It seemed like they were two steps ahead at all points during the pandemic,” said Walder. “The information that they put out was extremely valuable and allowed us to notify our patients

whenever a change occurred. They made sure we had always enough PPE, even though our practice required new masks for every encounter. The level of support was absolutely astronomical.”

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Caprice Walder
Practice Manager
Hope Cancer Care of Nevada



LOOKING AHEAD

As Hope Cancer Care of Nevada settles into its third year as an AON practice, they are looking ahead at ways to optimize the relationship. Walder has already signed the center up as a pilot practice for AON's financial assistance program, which helps patients with rising out-of-pocket costs, improving patient satisfaction and practice revenue.

They are also adopting AON's care management services. Patients will have access to a dietitian to set nutrition goals and reduce the severity of side effects. Doing so, says Walder, will provide additional support for patients without taking staff away from other core responsibilities.

Ultimately, Hope Cancer Care sees its relationship with AON as both enduring and mutually beneficial. One that gives them "a real shot

at maintaining our independence and proving that community-based oncologists are still viable," said Dr. Mehdi.



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