“It’s All About The Patient”

New McKinley Center Is Designed With Patients’ Comfort In Mind

By Janan Talafer
WHEN PAUL LOMBARDI WAS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER IN 2004, HE HAD NO IDEA THE TURNS HIS LIFE WOULD TAKE OR HOW YEARS LATER IT WOULD BRING HIM TO MOFFITT WHERE HE NOW PLAYS A KEY ROLE ON THE PATIENT AND FAMILY ADVISORY COUNCIL.

He was a lieutenant colonel and intelligence officer in the U.S. Army when a diagnosis of cancer came. But once his treatment was completed, Lombardi decided it was time to trade a 23-year military career for a sailboat. He sailed to the Florida Keys, the Bahamas, and up and down the East Coast.

Unfortunately, this idyllic routine didn’t last long; the cancer returned. More treatment followed, yet once again the cancer came back. Seven years from his initial diagnosis, he was still fighting the battle. This time though, Lombardi and his wife, Kristen, were referred to Moffitt Cancer Center.

“I knew from the minute I walked in the door that I was in the right place,” Lombardi says. “Everyone was very positive and friendly, but most importantly, I was able to get everything taken care of in one place. I can’t overstate how much of a difference that makes.”

The cancer was much worse this time. Doctors recommended a bone marrow transplant using umbilical cord stem cells, a procedure offered at Moffitt. The transplant was successful, but the risk of infection was too great to return to the boat. His sailing days were ending, setting him on a new course.

NEW ROLE AS A PATIENT ADVISOR

With Lombardi well on the way to recovery, he and Kristen decided it was time to make Tampa their permanent home. It wasn’t long before both began volunteering in the Moffitt Patient and Family Advisory Program.
Now in its 10th year, the program creates a platform for patients and family members to share their unique perspective on ways to enhance communication and to improve patient safety and satisfaction. The goal is to create a partnership between patients and staff that will continually improve the delivery of care. Although many hospitals across the country now have similar programs, Moffitt was a pioneer in inviting patients and families to collaborate with staff members. Moffitt was the second NCI comprehensive cancer center to start such a program, and it is modeled after the one at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston.

In the three years that he’s been on the Patient and Family Advisory Council, Lombardi has provided input on a redesign of both the Moffitt cafeteria and website and has been part of a selection team interviewing new hospital executives. Currently, he is on the project team for the new Moffitt McKinley Outpatient Center, a six-story, 207,000-square-foot facility that is scheduled to open in November.

“Just being able to expand Moffitt’s footprint and its ability to serve patients was very rewarding”

“I hope I have contributed half as much as I get in return,” Lombardi says. “It’s very satisfying to have the group ask what I think and then have my suggestions taken to heart and put into action. Moffitt has a culture that truly cares about what patients and family members think. “

Lombardi’s feedback was particularly valuable when the committee’s conversation turned to where to place the new Morsani Patient and Family Center, a hub for information, hospitality, support and expressive arts. The committee had considered placing the program near a clinical area on the second floor of the McKinley center, but Lombardi was adamant. “I said, ‘It’s unacceptable. It needs to be more visible so patients and family members can have easy access to it.’ I’m a strong advocate for the program, and I know how meaningful it is to patients. I did not want it to be hidden.”

The committee agreed, and the program was moved to the first floor just off the main lobby. Lombardi was able to help everyone see that from the time the patient walks in the front door, the message they receive should be: “We care about you and respect you as a whole person.” That type of commitment is part of the culture at Moffitt.

MEETING THE DEMAND

Building the new McKinley Center fulfills a critical need to meet the demand for expanded outpatient services, including ambulatory surgery, something Moffitt was unable to do at its main campus, which is at full capacity, Caraway says.

The new center will be on North McKinley Drive on the same site as M2Gen®, Moffitt’s subsidiary company focused on biotechnology. It is about a mile from the main Moffitt campus at the University of South Florida.

Patients and families can expect to find central registration, a café, blood draw lab, imaging services, a Publix pharmacy, and the Morsani Patient and Family Center on the first floor. An outdoor healing garden provides a meditative place to go between appointments.

The second floor will house the outpatient surgery center and additional services, including a quiet room. The Moffitt breast clinic, breast imaging services, genetic counseling, and Moffitt Cancer Center Screening and Prevention will be on the third floor, and a cutaneous clinic will be on the fourth floor. A clinical research unit, infusion rooms and infusion pharmacy will be on the fifth. The sixth floor will remain empty for future expansion.
Brian Yarborough has specialized in health care construction for more than a decade, but this was his first project for Moffitt. As the senior project manager for Skanska—the firm managing the design and construction of the project—Yarborough says it was inspiring to see the level of energy and excitement that the Moffitt team brought to the planning sessions.

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“Just being able to expand Moffitt’s footprint and its ability to serve patients was very rewarding,” Yarborough says. “But we also saw firsthand the passion everyone at Moffitt has for their patients. That enthusiasm was definitely transferred to the building design.”

Unlike planning for an office tower or a commercial building, designing a medical facility such as Moffitt is a very different process, Yarborough says. For example, life safety issues require mechanical and electric systems to be much more complex. “There was a significant behind-the-scenes effort to manage the ductwork, electrical and pipes—the systems that no one sees when the building is open,” Yarborough says.

The design of the second-floor outpatient surgery center also required extra effort.

“With an organization like Moffitt that is on the leading edge of technology, you want to make sure that when you open the building that you have the latest, most up-to-date equipment,” Yarborough says.

PATIENT-FRIENDLY DESIGN

As the Moffitt administrator overseeing the McKinley project’s success, Caraway wanted to make sure every decision was made with patient and family comfort and convenience in mind. This was especially important for way-finding signage.

“We believe in keeping everything as simple as we can, and that includes helping patients navigate their way through the building with ease,” Caraway says. “We also wanted patients to have a calm feeling, so we chose soft colors and nature scenes for the décor.”

Each of the center’s six floors is branded with a different color and an image from nature, from a tree to a fern leaf.

Parking was also given considerable attention.

“Our goal with parking was to make sure it was easy,” Caraway says. “Getting from the car to the wheelchair can be difficult, and we wanted to eliminate any stress or risk for falls.”

Patients now have several parking options. A seven-story parking garage with 1,300 parking spaces will connect directly to the McKinley Center via a covered walkway, helping patients avoid any inclement weather. Valet service will be available under a large canopy that overhangs the entrance of the building. Drivers will also be able to pull into a parking space near the valet service, and a valet will bring a wheelchair to the car, allowing those who would like to take their time to not feel rushed, Caraway says.

Inside the building, every effort was made to enhance patient dignity and privacy, including designing a separate surgical discharge elevator to eliminate the need for patients to take the main public elevator after undergoing outpatient surgery.

“The Moffitt leadership has been very invested in making sure the McKinley facility is the best it can be,” says Karenne Levy, director of the newly created Department of Patient Experience. “It is a testament to really understanding the patient voice. Any time you get input, create a partnership and build consensus it is the right thing to do. If we can alleviate any of the anxiety that patients feel and enhance their quality of life while they are here for treatment, then we have been successful.”

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