

Local doctor spurs acceptance of credentialed acupuncture at Martin-O'Neil Cancer Center

By Michelle Wing
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Thanks in part to the vision and persistence of a local Calistoga naturopathic doctor, cancer patients at St. Helena Hospital are receiving acupuncture as a component of a new pilot program.

Dr. Chris Henderson, a licensed acupuncturist, began offering "community acupuncture" at the Martin-O'Neil Cancer Center seven weeks ago. His services are free to patients, paid for by the Cancer Center.

St. Helena Hospital is the first Napa Valley hospital to provide acupuncture. The issue, Henderson explained, was creating a credentialing status for the profession, since all health professionals who work in a hospital must be credentialed.

The Martin-O'Neil Center already had a very strongly devel-



Dr. Chris Henderson

oped cancer support services center.

They approached Henderson, and asked him if he was interested in helping them add an acupuncture component. "I saw that if I did the footwork, I just needed an advocate, someone to push it through, show there was a need," Henderson said. The hospital was that advocate. "It only took about four months, which is really quick. There was that movement, that momentum."

Community acupuncture, Henderson said, differs from regular acupuncture in that he can

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Winters said all of the complementary programs are "evidenced-based" to enhance the healing process.

She said so far the response to community acupuncture has been incredible. "They [The patients] feel an overall improved sense of well being, more energy, and less stress," she said. "I'm thrilled that patients see this as helpful to them and beneficial to their treatment."

Currently, the acupuncture clinic is held on Wednesday nights from 4:30-7 p.m. It will be offered free to cancer patients through April, and then the Center will re-evaluate, to see if it can continue to offer the service without a fee, Winters said.

Henderson has had his own clinic in Calistoga, the Optimal Health Center, since 2000. He said he is hoping to begin a community acupuncture program locally on Thursday nights. Traditional acupuncture, with a one-on-one session, costs between \$75-\$125, while a community acupuncture session only costs about \$20, Henderson explained, making it much more accessible to a wider group of people.

Session lasts about 45 minutes, and treatments are usually once or twice a week, depending upon the severity of the symptoms.

The Optimal Health Center is located at 1705 Washington St. The office can be reached at 942-1250 or online at www.optimalhealthcenter.com.

treat up to 16 people at one time. Patients are sitting in chairs listening to music, instead of lying on tables. He does a short consultation, and then performs the treatment, mainly placing needles in easily accessible places like ears, wrists or hands.

Henderson said the symptoms he treats are various, from nausea caused by chemotherapy to peripheral neuropathy (tingling or numbness in the hands or feet), or stress, anxiety and depression. Those who have had breast cancer may be suffering from shoulder or back pain; a patient whose lymph nodes have been removed also suffers from specific body aches. All of these, acupuncture can address, Henderson said.

Colleen Winters, clinical navigator at the Martin-O'Neil Cancer Center, is responsible for guiding each patient through his or her "cancer journey." She's also the one who has created Cancer Support Services, the cutting-edge holistic approach to patient care that includes numerous modalities, besides Henderson's community acupuncture.

Patients have access to guided imagery, healing breath and movement therapy (a type of restorative yoga), music therapy, art therapy, aromatherapy, and massage therapy. There are also support groups: the Women's Cancer Circle, the Caregivers' Circle, and the Life Altering Illness Circle.

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