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Mobile Cancer Coach: Driving Cancer Prevention Home to Our Patients

Case for Support

Executive Summary

Our goal is to significantly reduce cancer in the region. To reach this goal, we must focus our efforts on preventing cancer and detecting it early. Our primary weapon in the fight against cancer is early detection. Early detection gives patients and their doctors the most choices when fighting this difficult disease.

Many of the residents in the region we serve face barriers to care and screenings that would give them early detection of dangerous cancers. Because they live in rural areas where transportation is difficult, are elderly, or are accustomed to accessing care only after symptoms become acute, many of these residents are unable to access information related to early detection.

To address these problems, in 2008, Bassett Medical Center pursued a mission-based program to expand access to cancer screening services, prevention, and education, particularly aimed at the under and uninsured in our region. The core resource in the program was the custom-designed cancer screening coach, fully equipped with clinic space, a registration area, and state-of-the-art mammography equipment. In 2014, the medical coach program was recognized by the Healthcare Association of New York State (HANYS) as the winner of the New York State Community Health Improvement Award.

With its self-contained clinical unit, the medical coach traveled to health centers, community and business sites, as well as community events throughout Bassett's eight-county, largely rural service region to offer early cancer detection screenings. Outfitted with digital technology for mammography and an exam room, the medical coach also allowed staff to perform additional types of cancer screenings, including cervical cancer screenings, pelvic exams with Pap tests, and colorectal cancer screenings. Patients were provided with education materials, an important component of each encounter. This proactive approach to early detection fulfilled the recommendations of the New York State Cancer Control Plan aimed at reducing the burden of cancer in New York State.



The Need

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in New York State, and more than 30,000 people die from cancer in New York each year, according to American Cancer Society data. That is more than 85 people dying every day.

The best way to prevent these deaths is to detect cancer early so that it can be treated most effectively. We can only detect cancer if we can bring people in for screening, but unfortunately, there are many barriers to early detection among the population served by Bassett. Many of the people we serve in our rural region are isolated, uninsured, elderly, or under-insured.

Cancer is often a disease of the elderly, and in all of the service counties, the percentage of residents over the age of 65 exceeds the state average. The residents are rural, public transportation is sparse or non-existent, and travel barriers are significant. Poverty is prevalent and population density is low. The older residents of the counties Bassett serves view health care as a resource to access in an emergency, not a resource to rely on for prevention. This fosters a mindset resistant to preventive care, such as routine screenings, which is reflected in increased morbidity and mortality resulting from cancer throughout the region served by the network.



PREVENTION & EARLY DETECTION

Many cancer deaths — perhaps as many as 12,000 annually in New York State — are preventable. Preventive education and early detection help to limit the effects of cancer, by curbing its spread and blunting its bite. Preventive education informs people of what they need to do to reduce their risk of cancer, by adopting healthier lifestyle habits, reducing their exposure to high risk environmental factors, and learning about how cancer may interact with their genetic heritage.

Women in central New York have higher rates of breast cancer than in any other part of the state, but fewer women here have mammograms, even though mammograms are the best way we can detect breast cancer in its earliest stages.

Early detection is a key to survival for many people diagnosed with cancer. When cancer is detected early, patients have more treatment options to choose from. A woman diagnosed with breast cancer has a 97% chance of surviving for five years if that cancer is diagnosed early. If breast cancer is diagnosed late, her chances of surviving five years fall to just over 23%.

These statistics are alarming, yet many patients wait too long before seeking cancer screening. Why?

Most people, especially those raised in a rural setting with little exposure to or experience with medical care, seek medical help only when symptoms become acute. When a patient experiences painful symptoms of many cancers, it is often too late to have many choices in cancer treatments.

We can stop the spread of cancer most effectively if we can reach the patients who might suffer from it early enough to help them. If we wait for symptoms to appear, when they traditionally would seek care, it is often too late. Instead, we need to bring care to them. We can do that with the Mobile Cancer Coach.

The Mobile Cancer Coach is an ideal mechanism for reaching the population that suffers from these cancers and has difficulty accessing the type of diagnostic and preventive services that could significantly reduce suffering from cancer in this region. The coach reaches a significant number of patients who live in rural areas, reflecting one of Bassett's goals to serve economically disadvantaged and underprivileged populations in rural settings.

- Early detection is usually possible only if a patient undergoes screening before symptoms arise, as the cancers detected this early do not cause pain or other obvious problems.
- Breast cancer is not the only type of cancer that can be arrested through early detection.
- Cervical and colorectal cancers can also be detected early, before they become symptomatic. Thus it is very important to get patients to participate in pre-cancer screening tests before symptoms occur.

The Project

The Cancer Services Program oversees the delivery of comprehensive breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screening and diagnostic services to eligible uninsured and under-insured individuals in New York State through local exams offered in the Mobile Cancer Coach.

The coach provides cancer screening services in a custom RV-type medical coach equipped with digital technology for mammography and other cancer screenings for both men and women. By bringing convenient screening services to populations in rural areas, Bassett continues reducing the number of cancer deaths that occur every year.

The medical coach offers screening services throughout Otsego, Oneida, Delaware, Chenango, Madison, Herkimer, Schoharie, Fulton and Montgomery counties. Screenings are available on a regular basis at Bassett's health centers as well as other community sites that can provide adequate space for the medical coach.

The cancer coach is equipped with the very latest 3-D radiology equipment for producing clear images of dense tissue. It also is equipped with self-contained technology and an exam room so that staff can perform additional types of cancer screening, including cervical cancer screenings, Pap tests, and colorectal cancer screenings. Credentialed mammographers travel with the coach to perform exams.

Digital mammograms take electronic pictures of the breast and store them in a computer where they can be enhanced, magnified, or manipulated for evaluation. The mobile coach is linked to each health center via EPIC, Bassett's electronic medical record system, so that images can be read by a radiologist at Bassett Medical Center within 24 hours of screening, and results can be shared with providers across the network.

The great advantage of the mobile cancer coach is that it can provide the very same care that we offer at Bassett Medical Center in Cooperstown—but locally, very close to home. For many people, this can mean the difference between getting screened and not getting screened—seeing a doctor and not seeing a doctor—or, perhaps, detecting cancer early, and not finding it until it may be too late to treat effectively.

Unfortunately, the newest Coach spent the majority of 2022 and 2023 off the road due to engine failure and electrical issues. Bassett must invest in a replacement Coach to continue to fulfill the needs of our patients.

The Cost

The total investment to acquire a new RV-type coach, equipped with digital screening equipment and clinical exam space, is \$1.5 million.

The Impact

Many people in our service area struggle with poverty and lack sufficient funds to regularly access medical care. Some of these people have difficulty getting to medical centers to obtain screening services because public transportation is sparse or unavailable, funds are tight, or public transportation conflicts with work hours. The cancer-screening coach provides service to these disabled, elderly, underserved, and impoverished patients. In June of 2020 we were pleased to screen a woman who we have become familiar with as she has used our service consistently for many years to receive her annual mammograms. This time they found an abnormality on her mammogram and she ended up having breast cancer. Thankfully it was found early because of her consistency with annual screening.

New York state's emergency restrictions during the first year

of the COVID-19 pandemic kept Bassett's mobile medical coach off the road for several months and due to staffing shortages, services were limited between September of 2021 and July of 2022. Still, 149 patients received screenings through the Bassett's CSP (Cancer Services Program), and another 330 patients were able to access mobile screenings throughout the Bassett network last year. Prior to the pandemic, the mobile medical coach and its practitioner team provided a total of 4,005 mammograms from 2018 through early 2020. From 2018 to July of 2022, 219 cervical screenings and 237 colorectal screenings were provided through the program. Since the mobile cancer screening program was first launched, more than 14,000 people have been screened as the result of Bassett's CSP. Over a thousand of those individuals required medical follow up, and more than 100 were diagnosed with cancer and received treatment.

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Background

Since 1927, when The Mary Imogene Bassett Hospital opened its doors to patients from Cooperstown and surrounding communities, its medical and administrative staffs have been dedicated to providing community service as well as exceptional health care. Today, as an integrated health-care system serving more than a quarter of a million people within a nine-county region in rural upstate New York, the Bassett Healthcare Network retains its focus on serving the patient and the community. Its mission has at its foundation a commitment to the patient, medical education, and health research—all of which are supported by a belief that everyone deserves access to high quality, compassionate and safe care, regardless of where they live and irrespective of ability to pay. Bassett Medical Center is the hub of the network. It is an acute care hospital, with the network's only intensive care unit, cardiac center, and trauma center with specific referral capabilities

59

**breast exams were
completed with three
requiring follow-up.**

34

**pelvic exams with pap
smears were completed
with six requiring
follow-up.**

16

**colorectal kits were
distributed with two
requiring follow-up.**

across the spectrum of medicine and surgery. The medical center is a teaching hospital with residency programs in medicine and surgery. An academic affiliation with Columbia University Vagelos Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons has been in place since 1947. In addition to Bassett Medical Center, Bassett Healthcare Network has four area community hospitals: Cobleskill Regional Hospital, O'Connor Hospital in Delhi, Little Falls Hospital, and A.O. Fox Hospital in Oneonta provide acute inpatient care and 24-7 emergency care. These hospitals also have the latest in diagnostic equipment such as MRI and CAT scan units. A fifth hospital, A.O. Fox Hospital - Tri-Town Campus in Sidney provides emergency care as well as laboratory and radiology services. A number of Bassett specialists see patients at the specialty services clinic on the Tri-Town campus. The Bassett Medical Group serves as the medical staff throughout the network and is comprised of more than 600 employed multi-specialty physicians and advanced-practice professionals. These practitioners see patients at network facilities throughout the region, providing professional expertise and medial skills typically found only in urban facilities. As a teaching hospital and medical school campus affiliated with Columbia, and through a nationally renowned Research Institute, Bassett is continually advancing its missions of patient care, teaching and research, always anticipating and developing to meet the evolving needs of the people and communities in the region we serve.



Recognition Opportunities

In consideration for gifts made to the Bassett Mobile Cancer Screening Coach, the following recognition opportunities are currently available.

Mobile Cancer Screening Coach

Logo on Back Panel of Coach (2 of 4 available)	\$250,000.00
Exam Room	\$100,000.00
Mammography Room	\$100,000.00



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