



## North Star Lodge Cancer Center

An example of practice excellence among medium practices

The facility name conjures a mental picture of a beautiful, tranquil lodge in an idyllic lush mountain setting. The 42,000 square foot facility does not disappoint. It is a bi-level structure on approximately five acres. You cross a rough plank bridge, over a bubbling stream to enter the foyer. A large portico shelters the front entrance protecting patients and visitors from occasional inclement weather.

Welcome to this month's HOPE award winning medium-size practice in the "Facility" category. In keeping with the lodge motif, the soaring 30-foot ceilings in the main lobby are made of pine decking

supported by rough timbers. Suspended above the lobby area are four chandeliers, each six to eight feet across, hand-made from willow tree branches, and laced together with leather strapping. Lighting is soft and inviting. Floor-to-ceiling windows provide expansive views over the beautiful green foliage, cascading waterfall, and stream that flows under the center of the building—dividing radiation therapy from medical oncology/hematology—and emerging at the front of the building under the bridge. Soft surround-sound enhances the lodge-like ambience. A stone fireplace—blazing all winter—fully occupies

the south wall surrounded by comfortable, cushioned sofas and chairs.

The timber-lodge-designed seating in various sizes and seat heights in the waiting area accommodates up to 56 patients and meets their every physical need. Near the center of the waiting room, a round table, covered with jigsaw puzzles in various stages of completion, appears occupied. Tables, made from tree trunks and heavy planks, and covered with magazines—some educational and some entertaining—are situated throughout the waiting room. Two rest rooms off the main waiting area, a public telephone, and a credenza continually stocked with coffee, tea, and cookies for patients by the volunteer staff—many of whom are cancer survivors—are only steps away.

The center is strategically located and easy to find. A city bus stop is located on the property. "We are directly off a main freeway, giving easy access, two traffic lights away, for all persons in the area we serve, and no more than 15 minutes for most residents within the city limits of Yakima," Mary L. Marsh, RN, MSN, director of oncology services said.

North Star Lodge (NSL) serves a regional population of 250,000, and operates two outreach clinics, one east of Yakima, and the other west of Yakima for consulting with patients and for the delivery of chemotherapy drugs. This enables out-of-town patients to be treated closer to their home.

In January 2005, NSL acquired a long-established local private oncology practice. The Lodge needed modification to support the more than threefold increase in patients per day and the increased demands of five medical oncologists. The existing structure was increased by 8,000 square feet. Patient access was a primary concern; parking and handicapped parking were addressed and a parking lot was built across the street to accommodate the increase in employees and to allow more parking for patients in the main parking lot. Additional physician offices were added. Seating was added in waiting areas, more bathrooms, exam rooms; consult and conference rooms were also added. The infusion area doubled,

as did the pharmacy. More medical record storage space, a fully functional financial services department, and a larger clinical trials department were included in the plan. Other additions include a large complementary medicine room for patient use and an exercise gym for physical therapy.

### E.M.B.R.A.C.E. patient-centered care

The patient-centered care program at North Star Lodge is called E.M.B.R.A.C.E.—an acronym for Empower, Mentor, Believe and hope, Refor for support, Acceptance, Culture of caring, and Experience meaning. Every physician and staff member participated in the development of the philosophy. “It embodies providing patients with the most advanced technology available, delivered by



The gardens and courtyard at North Star Lodge create a soothing, healing environment.

skilled, and compassionate physicians to treat the physical disease,” Vicky Jones, MD, Medical Director for NSL, said. “Patients will receive a comprehensive journal designed to manage and catalog appointments and information, as well as to guide and empower them through the use of six phases of personal transition and discovery program. It is intended to empower patients by treating their illness physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.”

Patients in Phase I often experience fear of the unknown, and by providing a welcoming, lodge environment North Star ensures their first contact is comfortable.

In Phase II of the E.M.B.R.A.C.E. program, patients meet with their physicians and nurse educators who walk them through their personal treatment notebook; they are enrolled in an education class to learn about the services available.

Mentors are key in helping patients begin to acknowledge their feelings in Phase III as they explore the body/mind connection, a spiritual connection and complementary medicine. Staff mentors as well as peer mentors—both those who have received formal training as well as former and current patients—are available in support group settings such as yoga, journaling, and painting classes created to promote sharing.

In Phase IV patients receive individualized counseling focused on creating the best treatment path. Patients learn to use the resources available, to make choices for their ongoing care, to consider their choices about complementary medicine, and side effect management.

Phase V, the survivorship plan, is devoted to acceptance of what is. Patients receive support for difficult questions like, “How has my life changed?” and “What will my future be like?” as well as support in dealing with the fear of recurrence.

Phase VI helps the patient experience meaning in their faith, family, friends and future as they are introduced to opportunities to give back to others, volunteer as a mentor, or in some cases, prepare for their final wishes. All patients undergo an exit interview with a psychosocial nurse at the close of Phase VI to provide feedback on their experience so the team can continue to improve.

Patients are encouraged to explore their connection to others as part of their holistic treatment plan throughout the six-phase patient-centered care program. The staff ensures patients and their support team of family, friends and caregivers will feel at home from their first visit through graduation.

### Patient and family

The North Star Lodge facility is the physical extension of the E.M.B.R.A.C.E. philosophy. Arriving patients find 63 patient parking spaces, twelve of which are handicap-designated, conveniently located in front of the building within 20 feet of the entry. A large two-car covered portico in front of the facility accommodates patient drop-off in inclement weather, wheelchair drop-offs, and ambulance access.

A concierge desk in the front lobby is staffed daily by one employee who directs patients to one of two reception desks—one for radiation therapy and one for medical oncology—or to services on the lower level such as dietitian, social services, financial counselor. “The concierge makes all transportation and interpreter appointments for patients, coordinating that with their physicians, infusion, lab, and RT schedules. We also have a volunteer who makes all reminder calls for next day appointments, schedules all conference rooms, and generally helps people in the lobby with coffee, cookies, or questions they have,” Marsh said.

A lab drawing room is conveniently located off the main lobby. Patients requiring only lab work may check in at the reception area, go directly to the lab, and leave, saving them time and steps. The outpatient pharmacy window is conveniently—but privately—located a few steps from the front entry making Rx pick-up fast and efficient.

Near the exam room and just a few feet from the waiting room, patients, their family members, physicians, nurses, and social services personnel meet in the patients’ consult room and discuss or review their case or other important matters. The room has a telephone and has computer access to medical records and financial information. Five meeting areas in the building in addition to the

patient consult room are also available. The radiation therapy conference room seats approximately fifteen, a “community room” with fireplace and audiovisual equipment seats up to 45 persons and can be opened to the adjoining library to accommodate up to 200 persons for larger events. The Café Annex conference room seats fifteen and the administrative conference room will accommodate 10-15 persons.

A full CLIA certified laboratory, X-Ray services, and CAT scan services are on site. “We currently have 22 chemotherapy chairs, two private rooms with bed or chairs, an injection clinic, and a telephone triage RN is available daily,” Marsh said. “Infusion services include the administration of blood, platelets, FFP, IVIG products as well as hydration, central line care, various biologicals and a number of supportive medications. Radiation therapy consists of two Varian linear accelerators with a wide range of photon and electron energies, high-dose-rate brachytherapy, low-dose-rate brachytherapy, permanent seed implants, radiopharmaceuticals, short-course and fractionated stereotactic radiosurgery, 3D treatment planning, multimodality image fusion, beam modulation, IMRT, and IGRT.”

Patients undergoing infusion care are welcome to invite guests into spacious, sunlit, treatment areas, complete with individualized entertainment centers. During colder months, patients undergoing infusion care may elect to relax by one of two rock fireplaces that warm the room and further the lodge-inspired atmosphere. The opportunity for private accommodations is available if needed.

Patient exam rooms are large enough to accommodate the patient and one or two patient-invited guests comfortably. For family members or friends of patients who prefer to wait in the great room, snacks and beverages and jigsaw and other puzzles are available to make patients and their family or friends more comfortable.

Fourteen examination rooms—all painted in warm tones—encircle a central nurse’s station. The station accommodates up to ten

flow nurses and one unit secretary. A procedure room for bone marrow BX, paracentesis, etc. is also provided in this area. The space is designed to accommodate five physicians. Colorful photo art from the surrounding countryside and region and a mirror framed with small tree branches tied together decorates each exam room wall. Each room contains the customary exam table, counter with computer station, PACS imaging system, a sink, and two visitor chairs.

“Physicians and nurse navigators understand that patients and their families are more comfortable with treatments and procedures they understand,” Charlotte Montgomery, MSN, psycho-social nurse, said. “They take the time to explain the patient’s diagnosis and options, including: clinical trials, complementary medicine, symptom management—and answer questions the patient or their family may have.”

Patients are encouraged to bring their family, caretaker or friends to scheduled activities, as well as to appointments or to use the in-house gym. This invitation includes former patients in remission or who are cancer-free. Patients and their families or guests are welcome to use the Stepping Stones library and resource center to relax with an inspiring book, or to research a topic or treatment of interest.

The complementary medicine room offers comfortable lodge-style furniture, a waterfall, and a table and chairs for 8-10 persons. It is used for many classes and support groups. “All these rooms are available for community groups to meet when we are not using them,” Marsh said. “People from all over the community and out of town can experience the lodge in a non-threatening way and recommend it to their friends and families. Some groups that meet here include the Chamber of Commerce, local civic and fraternal organizations, not-for-profit groups, and other health care agencies in the community.”

#### Clinical and administrative staff

The care team at NSL includes chemotherapy-certified nurses, clinical trials, CRC, and CRC nurses, pharmacists, radiation thera-



The mountain lodge theme at North Star Lodge is reflected in the reception/waiting area.

pists, dosimetrists, physicists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, emotional health counselors, and administrators who all collaborate with each other to make sure a patient's experience at NSL is as smooth as possible. "Social services and financial advising are also available to all of our patients," Kay Maples, BSW, social worker, said. "North Star also offers an array of professionally-facilitated complementary medicine classes and educational opportunities. Among these we offer 'Learn At Lunch' workshops; 'Celebrate Life' scrapbooking; Artful Expressions; Healing Power of Journaling; Healing Yoga; Look Good, Feel Better; a women's cancer support group, Life After Cancer, a young adult cancer support group; and education regarding imagery, acupuncture, massage, body mapping, healing of the heart, acupressure, reflexology, pain management, reiki, and healing touch."

More than 80 computers provide every staff person access to data, records, and e-mail. "We are partially electronic and partially paper. Active patient's records are located on the first floor in lockable revolving cabinets and inactive or completed charts are located on the lower level in a large secured storeroom designed for record copying and storage," Cathy Smith from Medical Records said.

The library is available to patients, family members, staff and the community. "Several hundred books on cancer, and a number of topics our patients have told us they are interested in, like life changes and positive thinking can be found here," Eunice Koeppe a NSL Volunteer said. "Soft, comfortable chairs, lamps, and tables create an environment where one can sit peacefully for a time read-

ing or doing research on the computer. Windows in the library overlooking the waterfall and the scenery outside while soft relaxing music plays in the background enhances the tranquility of this space for our patients, guests and staff."

Drugs are stored and prepared in their state-licensed secured pharmacy by licensed pharmacists. Nurses take premeds from a preloaded computerized drug dispensing cabinet for use in the infusion area.

The staff enjoys the native beauty and planning that went into designing NSL for patients. A café for staff is equipped with an oven, dishwasher, three microwave ovens, cabinets, counters for food prep, vending machines, two side-by-side refrigerators with ice makers, and bistro tables and seating for staff members. Staff members relax in the complementary medicine room—which many refer to as the "living room"—and outside the building, patients, guests, and staff enjoy a walking and memorial pathway with lovely foliage and running water.

"All staff members are encouraged to attend a complementary medicine class or education class one hour per week—with supervisor approval—so they can personally recommend a therapy that they believe may be helpful to patients or their families," Marsh said. "This is a benefit we feel staff members who are caring for cancer patients need for their own wellbeing. All CAM classes are free to staff, patients of NSL or their family members. Staff members can receive a free 30-minute massage from a student masseuse or half-price massages from fully-licensed massage staff in the physical/occupational/Lymphedema therapy department. And a drawing is held once a month for a free massage for a staff person at NSL."

Dedicated employee parking is available in two places. In the rear of the building there are 65 spaces, a few feet from the entry doors, and additional parking is available in the lot across the street accommodating approximately another 70 vehicles, in addition to two handicap-designated parking spaces for staff, a dedicated motorcycle and motor scooter parking spot, and parking for bicycles.

A remote camera system and 24 hours a day security patrols monitor the building, parking lots, and surrounding areas. Motion sensors, and passcode keypad entry monitor building access. Male staff will escort patients and staff to their cars if needed. All walkways and pathways are maintained during the year for safety.

### Community support and outreach

North Star Lodge hosts monthly "Learn at Lunch" information seminars that address health topics relevant to patients, their friends, family, and the general public where the public can experience its welcoming, family-friendly facility. NSL also sponsors and hosts the Healing Arts Expo. Online resources to support caregivers are found at [www.northstarlodge.org](http://www.northstarlodge.org).

In addition to providing community education and resources, North Star Lodge sponsors and hosts cancer screenings to promote awareness and ensure residents have regular access to critical prevention. Screenings include tests for skin, colon and prostate cancers, among others. **H**