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Contact:

Susan McDonald

Senior Communications Specialist

860.874.2196 (mobile)

Susan.McDonald@hhchealth.org

Cancer Institute Invited To Join National Program On Healthcare Diversity

HARTFORD – As the Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute has expanded services across Connecticut, bringing specialists offering advanced care to locations closer to residents’ homes, national organizations have taken notice.

The work to minimize discrepancies in care for minorities and those living in rural areas, also called health care disparity populations, has earned the Cancer Institute a prestigious grant from the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Conquer Cancer Foundation.

A team of Cancer Institute clinicians, led by Dr. Alvaro Menendez, recently spent two days at ASCO’s Virginia headquarters meeting representatives of the other nine programs selected across the nation to participate in ASCO’s Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI®) and Quality Training Program (QTP). Hartford HealthCare is the only participant from the Northeast.

“We earned this grant based on merit and the populations we serve,” explained Dr. Menendez. “These are not easily awarded grants. This is recognition of years of effort by the Cancer Institute team and recognition that the institution has really

put its resources towards eliminating these discrepancies, something that is atypical.”

The goal of the ASCO program is to train the participants to identify care deficiencies they can target for improvement. The program includes:

- Six months of in-person sessions with seminars, case examples and small group exercises, as well as on-site work and virtual meetings with ASCO staff and improvement coaches.
- Working with the QTP to select, design and implement a quality improvement project that is executed with the guidance of experienced improvement coaches.
- Training on abstracting chart data from QOPI that will help zero in on specific areas for quality improvement.
- A one-day QTP workshop to help incorporate the principals of quality improvement and disseminate the knowledge the team has gained throughout the Cancer Institute.

The work, Dr. Menendez said, enhances what Hartford HealthCare has been doing in Connecticut, a leading state in minimizing disparities in cancer care, according to a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

The Cancer Institute’s efforts include moving top-notch physicians and infusion services out of the capital city and into community settings from Torrington to Norwich. Dr. Menendez, for example, spends one day each week seeing patients at Windham Hospital.

“It’s a 45-minute drive for me to get to Windham, but it’s part of bringing the care closer to the people who need it,” he said. “We are going to the patient, and bringing them the possibility of receiving subspecialized care very close to their own homes. This minimizes the wait time to cancer staging and directed therapy, which will likely translate into improved outcomes and survival rates.” Dr. Menendez

continued by saying, "All of the research indicates being treated locally is much better for the patient."

Such efforts to minimize discrepancies in cancer care was why Dr. Menendez wanted to join Hartford HealthCare in 2019.

"My passion is minority oncology and disparities. Some other work we are doing is attempting to find out why minorities and underrepresented populations are not being screened for preventable types of cancer such as breast, colorectal and prostate cancer" he explained. "Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute incorporated this into their vision a long time ago. My excitement was reciprocated here at the Cancer Institute. That's how I knew I would be a right fit for the team".

Dr. Menendez concluded by stating "this new opportunity with ASCO will only further our ability to help cancer patients in Connecticut achieve positive outcomes. These are very exciting times for cancer care delivery for all of Connecticut residents."

For more information about the care being given through the Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute, go to hartfordhealthcare.org/cancer.

*With 30,000 colleagues and total operating revenue of \$4.3 billion, **Hartford HealthCare** has cultivated a strong, unified culture of accountability and innovation. Its care-delivery system, with more than 360 locations serving 185 towns and cities, includes two tertiary-level teaching hospitals, an acute-care community teaching hospital, an acute-care hospital and trauma center, three community hospitals, the state's most extensive behavioral health network, a large multispecialty physician group, a clinical care organization, a regional home care system, an array of senior care services, and a large physical therapy and rehabilitation network. Hartford HealthCare's unique, system-wide Institute Model offers a single, high standard of care in crucial specialties at hospital and ambulatory sites across Connecticut. The institutes include: Cancer, Heart and Vascular, Ayer Neuroscience, Orthopedics and Tallwood Urology. Visit Hartford HealthCare at www.hartfordhealthcare.org*