

The Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness Center

“Cancer treatment is no longer just about giving chemotherapy,” says Janet Bloch, ANP, director of the Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness Center at Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI). “It’s about looking at people holistically, supporting their emotional and physical needs in addition to treating the cancer itself.”

Since 2006, that’s just what the Wellness Center has done for people who are or were treated for cancer at HCI as well as their loved ones. It has been so successful that programs and services broadened significantly in 2007.

The Fitness Program, one of the first Wellness Center offerings, now provides many activities throughout the year. This program helps people manage side effects such as fatigue through group activities that make them feel good and build strength during and after treatment. Active support groups include fly-fishing, hiking, road biking, rowing, and snowshoeing. At HCI, activities include circuit training, yoga, and weekly one-on-one workouts with a cancer exercise specialist. Thanks to HCI’s status as an institute of the University of Utah, the Fitness Program also offers aqua-toning classes at the University Orthopaedic Center on campus.

The Bone Health and Osteoporosis Program is a new addition in 2007. Cancer survivors are at even higher risk of bone thinning than the general population—because of the cancer itself or as a

result of treatment—so bone health is an important aspect of comprehensive cancer care. Working with the program’s medical director, Pamela Hansen, MD, patients receive a bone health evaluation, education about risk factors and how to modify risk, and long-term follow-up. Patients may also work with cancer exercise specialists in the Fitness Program to establish a personal exercise routine.

Related to bone health and overall well-being is proper nutrition, and the Wellness Center covers that topic, too. New in 2007, the Wellness

Center provides nutrition counseling through which patients and families receive guidance about balanced nutrition as well as information about treatment-related side effects and health suggestions for specific cancers. Amanda Luekenga, registered dietitian, meets with patients and family members in the Wellness Center or while they undergo chemotherapy treatments in HCI’s Infusion Suite.

Among other new services offered by the Wellness Center are acupuncture to help control pain and nausea and a workshop to help parents

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Anita Keetch, cancer exercise specialist, works with patients in the Wellness Center's Fitness Program.

diagnosed with cancer talk to their kids about it. The Wellness Center also collaborates with HCI's Social Work Department to promote various support groups and enroll patients and their loved ones.

“Other cancer centers have pieces of what we have, but nothing as comprehensive and not at the actual facility. Our range of services, all under one umbrella, could become a national model in cancer care,” Bloch says.

The Wellness Center also provides services designed especially for HCI employees. Among them are a brown-bag lunch series addressing topics such as flexibility and attaining goals. The Fitness Program also sponsors an interdepartmental fitness and weight management challenge during the holidays; 2007 marks the second year. “These activities help employees be healthier, but they also allow employees to experience for themselves the value the Wellness Center brings,” Bloch says.

To help measure the effectiveness of various programs and services, the Wellness Center currently participates in a study with researchers from HCI and the University of Utah, with more expected to follow. These studies will help the Wellness Center continue to improve and broaden its offerings. Future plans include a therapeutic art and expression program, a creative writing workshop, a book club, a dance class, and a retreat for cancer survivors.

“The Wellness Center is a positive part of what can be a negative, isolating experience,” Bloch says. “We help focus on long-term care issues for people who we anticipate will be living much longer lives due to advanced treatments and improved survival rates. They learn things they can do for themselves, things they have control over—during treatment and long afterward. It is life-affirming and empowering. I know we can help people feel better.”



Bob and Linda Wiggins, center, with the Wellness Center staff

The Wiggins name is very familiar to Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) staff, volunteers, and friends, and in 2007 it became even more recognizable.

Linda, who was diagnosed with cancer in 1997 and treated at HCI, and her husband Bob were longtime supporters of HCI's mission to improve cancer research, treatment, and education. Both participated in Huntsman Cancer Foundation programs in support of HCI, including Hometown Heroes, where fundraiser volunteers train for the Salt Lake City marathon, half-marathon, 5K, and bike tour. They also volunteered for the annual Radio-A-Thon fundraiser with local station K-Bull 93 FM.

To top off their generosity, the Wigginses gave a large donation to help further HCI's research mission. In September 2007, the Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness Center was named in their honor.

“Nobody wants to have cancer,” Linda said at the event. “It's easy to lose sight of your physical ability—and there are so many other losses. Support services like the Wellness Center are essential and can help people get back to some sense of normalcy.”

In October 2007, Linda passed away with her husband Bob by her side—where he stood in loving support throughout her fight. Linda will always be remembered as a dear friend of HCI. She turned a very challenging personal situation into a journey that provided hope and support for countless others.