

phoenix

Cancer Care for the Body, Mind, and Spirit

Ironwood Cancer and Research Centers deliver supportive, integrative care you can trust.

A cancer diagnosis is hard enough without the difficulties and side effects that may come with treatment. But add in extreme fatigue, nausea, brain fog, and neuropathy to the equation, and the toll on the mind, body, and spirit can seem insurmountable.

Integrative oncology, however, is an evolving area of cancer care that, for many years, has demonstrated its worth and value in providing cancer patients with holistic support and complementary treatments proven to diminish side effects and improve mental well-being when layered into conventional treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation, or surgery.

Dr. Heidi Rula, board-certified and fellowship-trained in integrative medicine, is a leader in the field with more than 20 years of experience working with patients in the Phoenix area. She joined Ironwood Cancer and Research Centers in 2018, tasked with expanding the centers' integrative oncology offerings into a full spectrum program assisting patients from diagnosis through treatment, recovery, and into survivorship.

Benefits of Integrative Oncology

"An integrative approach to cancer treatment can decrease symptoms of the disease as well as the side effects that may come with treatment," Dr.

Rula says. "In fact, the body of scientific evidence that supports the use of mind-body therapies such as meditation, yoga, acupuncture, lymphatic massage, and other therapies to improve the overall quality of life of cancer patients continues to grow."

Dr. Rula's role at Ironwood Cancer and Research Centers—a collective of 15 community-based facilities strategically located throughout the metro Phoenix area—is to see each patient as the individual she is, the person behind the cancer, and to work in partnership with each patient to create a plan and provide tools to deal with the stress, anxiety, pain, and discomfort that frequently accompany cancer and its treatment.

"Integrative oncology is just one piece of the multidisciplinary, person-centered approach to medicine that's making a difference in patients' cancer journeys," explains Dr. Rula. "Options like acupuncture as a means to overcome pain instead of or in concert with pain medications or using yoga to fight off fatigue are both valid and supported by scientific studies."

Survivorship Programs

Integrative care extends beyond treatment and into survivorship as well. According to Dr. Rula, that period can be as fraught with stress and anxiety as any other during the cancer journey.

"It's a critical phase in the healing process during which there's an

expectation that patients will simply exist with no plan or treatment, just waiting for the results of their next scans," she notes.

They may also be dealing with very real residual side effects such as fatigue and neuropathy as well as new stressors pertaining to issues of spirituality or sexuality, for example.

"But survivorship is an area in which integrative oncology really shines," Dr. Rula says. "Through complementary therapies such as nutritional guidance, guided imagery, physical therapy, and more, we can help cancer patients live mindfully and find joy every day."

Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers offer individual counseling, support groups, educational classes, and other integrative services. Support groups and classes offered are open to all individuals in the community affected by cancer and are not limited to Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers patients.

Care in Collaboration

Ironwood Women's Centers' multidisciplinary approach to cancer care creates compassionate one-stop treatment centers for patients.

When someone receives a cancer diagnosis, the last thing they want to do is drive across town from appointment to appointment. That's why each of Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers' five comprehensive cancer centers has a multidisciplinary team of surgeons, medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, genetic counselors, nutritionists, social workers, and more to provide everything a cancer patient needs under one roof.

"Our specialists collaborate across disciplines, so every patient's treatment is decided according to a consensus arrived at by the specialists," says Dr. Rashmi Vaidya, a board-certified and fellowship-trained breast surgeon. "Patients are informed of the clinical consensus and are involved in the decision-making process for their treatment plan, which is very empowering.

"When treatments are discussed, we make it a point to share with the patient where we're getting our information from," Dr. Vaidya continues. "We show them data from clinical trials to explain why we recommend one kind of treatment over another. Everything we do is evidence-based, and our camaraderie across specialties helps us provide the best patient-centered care in a community setting."

Visiting a physician face-to-face is required for new patients, but in the case of a pandemic, Ironwood Women's Centers provide the option of telemedicine conference calls for established patients to discuss results or next steps. Additionally,

state-of-the-art genetic counseling and testing are available on-site at all locations.

Breast Surgery

Having trained as a surgeon in both India and the U.S. before completing her breast surgical oncology fellowship at the Cleveland Clinic, Dr. Vaidya brings world-class diagnostic and surgical skills to Ironwood Women's Centers' Glendale and Phoenix locations.

"My endoscopy-assisted oncoplastic breast surgery training in Japan allows me to do specialized, minimally-invasive surgeries through the axilla for selected patients," says Dr. Vaidya. "We also perform oncoplastic breast surgery where we not only take the cancer out, but reconstruct the breast for the best possible cosmetic outcome."

The breast surgeons at Ironwood Women's Centers also work in collaboration with plastic surgeons for immediate reconstruction in the setting of skin or nipple sparing mastectomies so women feel whole again after surgery. Plastic surgeons are involved in reconstructions during or after lumpectomies. For example, because patients with large breasts require a higher dosage of radiation post-lumpectomy, Dr. Vaidya recommends coordinating the patient's breast surgery with a plastic surgeon preoperatively for a breast reduction operation in addition to cancer removal. When the patient wakes up, she has received a lumpectomy and will walk away with smaller, symmetrical breasts that no longer cause back pain.

Gynecologic Oncology

As with breast cancer, early detection of gynecologic cancers, such as ovarian cancer, increases the odds of an optimal recovery.

"The goal of screening for ovarian cancer is to identify a mass growing in the ovaries or fallopian tubes while the cancer is still at a localized and more curable stage," says Dr. Mario Javier Pineda, a fellowship-trained gynecologic oncologist board-certified in obstetrics and gynecology. "Women need to be aware of their bodies and pay attention to symptoms common to patients with ovarian cancer such as abdominal or pelvic pain, bloating, or changes in bowel habits."

With community-based centers strategically located throughout the metro Phoenix area, Ironwood Women's Centers offer advanced therapies and a multidisciplinary approach usually associated with large academic centers—but with a personalized touch that recognizes the individual needs of each patient.



Heidi Rula, MD



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& Research Centers**

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