

Compassionate Cancer Care for Every Patient

Renowned for providing comprehensive, personalized care, Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers balances innovation and compassion in a multidisciplinary setting.

Over the past 20 years, oncology has advanced at a pace that is nothing short of amazing. Because of this rapid growth, providers must remain on top of cutting-edge changes in their fields.

As an academic institution, Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers occupies the critical space of groundbreaking oncology. At Ironwood, more than 100 providers collaborate in a multidisciplinary setting guided by academic research and innovative clinical trials. Within this dynamic environment, one person remains preeminent: the patient.

“The team at Ironwood is at the top of their field,” says Ian Komenaka, M.D., FACS, breast surgeon. “No matter what treatment path you take, we’re going to do the right thing for you.”

A Multidisciplinary Approach to Cancer

At Ironwood Women’s Centers, a team of talented oncologists tackles breast cancer, which is the leading cause of cancer death in women worldwide.

“There are many types of breast cancer, and you have to treat them all differently because of their distinguishing features,” says Dr. Komenaka. This differentiation, combined with a shift in the philosophy of oncology treatment, has influenced his approach to surgery. “The thought process for surgery is different from the thought process for radiation and medical oncology; it’s moving steadily toward ‘less is more,’” he says. “I focus on completely removing the cancer while maintaining as much of the integrity of the breast as possible.”

Breast cancer is not just one disease but made up of various subtypes. “At Ironwood, we focus on providing personalized state-of-the-art management options for our patients,” says Sumeet Mendonca, M.D., Director of Breast Oncology.

Dr. Mendonca stresses the importance of understanding a patient’s unique circumstances, preferences, and goals. This allows oncologists to combine expertise and cutting-edge treatments with empathy to address not just the disease but the emotional, social, and practical aspects of a patient’s life.



Ian Komenaka, M.D., FACS,
Breast Surgeon

“As technology and therapy options expand, we provide our patients with optimized multidisciplinary and collaborative breast cancer care,” she says. “By keeping up with what’s coming down the pipeline, we empower patients as they face the journey ahead.”

For Dr. Mendonca and Dr. Komenaka, Ironwood’s collaborative environment lends itself to the multidisciplinary approach that breast cancer demands. “The normal sequence of events for breast cancer treatment used to be surgery, chemotherapy, radiation; but we can and do change that order, thanks in part to our multidisciplinary approach,” says Dr. Komenaka. “I can walk out of my office and immediately consult with a medical oncologist about a specific patient. At another practice, that patient might have to make a separate appointment with a new provider.”

Dr. Mendonca adds, “From a breast cancer standpoint, we have a collaborative team of breast surgeons and medical and radiation oncologists with support from geneticists, integrative oncologists, nutritionists, and social workers to help deliver individualized, comprehensive care for patients. As someone who is passionate about patient care, I think we do this exceptionally well at Ironwood.”



Sumeet Mendonca, M.D.,
Director of Breast Oncology

Specialized Treatment

For a long time, medical oncology included any type of cancer requiring diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. That paradigm has recently shifted due to the unique characteristics and behaviors of different cancers. Following that shift, Ironwood’s medical oncologists now practice according to subspecialties.

“As cancer has grown in complexity, so have treatments,” says Darshil Shah, M.D., MPH, director of gastrointestinal malignancies. “If you focus on one type of tumor, over time it makes you more confident in your decision-making.”

As part of his specialty, Dr. Shah deals with the sharp uptick in early-onset colorectal cancer. Though researchers have not found a definitive cause, lifestyle factors such as diet, alcohol consumption, and obesity are likely to play a role. For Dr. Shah, an intensive focus on this cancer is helping to forward further research.

“One of the benefits of subspecialization is that it helps our team secure clinical trials,” he says. “If we can get our advanced cancer patients into trials, they can benefit greatly from the latest research.”



Darshil Shah, M.D., MPH,
Director of Gastrointestinal Malignancies

Dr. Shah credits Ironwood’s unique infrastructure for the speed at which clinical trials are launched. “As a physician-owned, community-focused center, there’s less bureaucracy,” he says. “If there’s an innovative way to help patients, we quickly implement it here.”

For Dr. Shah and his peers, the availability of groundbreaking cancer treatments—including treatments that target subcategories of tumors with different malignancies—necessitates a more personalized approach to patient care than has been historically practiced. At Ironwood, personalization starts at intake.

“What fuels our passion at Ironwood is making a real difference in our patients’ lives. We offer them hope, support, and innovative treatments during what can be one of the most challenging times they’ll face,” says Dr. Mendonca.

Achieving that blend of compassion and care through rigor and research is part of Ironwood’s mission. “You are constantly learning and staying on the cutting edge of research,” Dr. Shah says. “As providers, we strive to attain a deeper understanding of the cancers we treat,” adds Dr. Mendonca. “When patients come here, they know they will be taken care of.”