

Urology Center Partners with YMCA for Patient Wellness Program

BY JANE EHRHARDT

Stepping outside their specialty to stimulate all-round health in their patients, Urology Centers of Alabama (UCA) just began offering their patients free memberships at the nearby YMCA. "We take pride in caring for other aspects of our patients' wellness that may involve things other than the surgery we perform or the medicines we put them on," says Mark DeGuenther, MD, president of UCA.

Pre- and post-operative patients and those undergoing treatments, such as radiation and chemotherapy, start with a free fitness assessment by the YMCA staff. The trainers then build a fitness plan specifically for that patient's needs. "Healthy patients recover from surgery better than unhealthy ones," DeGuenther says. Patients can also meet with a registered nutritionist to gain expert direction on diet and healthy eating.

The UCA physicians hope the strengthening of the body, the interaction with trained fitness providers, and being among supporters will uplift a patient's mind and spirit. "There's a psychological impact of cancer, and ED has



(L-R): John Myer, CFO of YMCA, Drs. Brain Larson, Mark DeGuenther, Mike Bivins, Tom Holley, Eric Brewer of UCA, and Cham Norman Executive Director of the Shades Valley YMCA.

cal overlay," DeGuenther says. "Patients suddenly feel vulnerable, frail, mortal. It brings it home." This can deflate patients mentally and emotionally, sapping their recuperative strength.

DeGuenther also thinks the program might deter some self-destructive lifestyle choices that lead to many chronic diseases. "Rather than just say,

to lose weight,' and sending them out the door, I'm able to give them a tool now — a program designed for them," he says.

After the month's free membership from UCA, the patient receives a fitness assessment and can continue at their own expense. "We want to try and open that door for patients, but we can't push them through it," DeGuenther says.

The wellness program grew out of discussions following UCA's \$50,000 donation to the Shades Valley YMCA capital campaign. The campaign, nearing its completion, will include a new multipurpose group exercise room, entitled "Triangle – Spirit, Mind and Body" and be named for Urology Centers of Alabama.

DeGuenther says the donation and the program "allowed us to show our commitment to the community, because the programs at the Y are valuable. And we also get to demonstrate our commitment to our patients in seeing that they can get the best care possible."

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Sims says.

Consults with specialists in anything from plastic surgery to ENT, or additional tests, such as MRIs, x-rays, and colonoscopies, can be scheduled for additional fees. "The day can be tailored to what may best suit them," Sims says. Each patient meets with the Program's physician at the start of the day when adjustments to the basic core of tests can be made.

The wellness part of the Program includes a nutritional consultation and a fitness assessment, along with an audiogram. Patients walk away with "a basic knowledge of where they stand now physically. And then also on where they could go if they trained or concentrated on some fitness or nutritional issue," Sims says.

"We want to show them where they could be if they continue, preferably using our services," he says, spotlighting their personal trainers, dieticians, and physician-monitored weight loss program. "We are trying to promote our facility, and we'd love for them to stay involved here."

When the full results from the labs and the radiologists are in, the Executive Health Program physician calls the client to review the outcomes and discuss any follow-up recommendations. Then the patient receives the formal written report within four weeks, though ten days is more common.

Patients pay for the Executive Health Program up front. Some corporations partner with the clinic to receive reduced rates for a guaranteed number of executives. "Some of the companies have executives around the country, so they fly in and spend the night," Sims says.

"Strategically, we want to do a lot of things out here," Sims says, mentioning a youth sports medicine program as an example. More immediate plans revolve around an ambulatory surgery center on the campus. In September, St. Vincent's received their certificate of need for the expansion. "We're evaluating what to do and how to do it. We don't have specifics, but we're looking forward to this."

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