

# AURORA CANCER CARE NEWS & VIEWS

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## Message from the Vice President, Aurora Cancer Care



**James Weese, MD, FACS**  
Vice President,  
Aurora Cancer Care

In the musical “Annie” there is a song that starts “The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow.” For a patient with cancer in the time of the COVID pandemic, I’m sure those words are hard to believe. Pandemics, or plagues have been around for centuries.

Passover reminds us of the plagues resulting in Jewish slaves being released by the Pharaoh. The Bubonic Plague, starting in 1342 and taking until the mid-1700’s to be fully eradicated killed somewhere between 75 and 200 million people. People alive today have lived through the Spanish Flu, Polio, hepatitis, AIDS, HIV, SARS, MERS, Ebola, and now COVID among others. Science has and will continue to develop vaccines and cures now aided by recent advances in Genomics, Molecular Medicine, and preventive techniques. Certainly, as terrible as this latest pandemic has been, there will be a resolution.

Despite the pandemic, Aurora Cancer Care (ACC) has been able to adapt, change workflows, and take excellent care of our patients. As more COVID testing becomes available, our cancer surgeons will continue to provide cancer surgery for more patients.

All ACC sites have been able to rearrange schedules and furnishings to maintain social distancing for patients coming to our clinics. Physicians and advanced practice clinicians (APCs) have carefully reviewed their schedules to see only patients who needed to come to the office in person. The judicious use of masks and protective gear have extended from the inpatient to the outpatient environment to decrease COVID exposure as much as possible.

Smart phone apps including the MyAdvocateAurora and LiveWell apps have helped us move forward with patient interactions. With the help of Aurora colleagues in other disciplines, our physicians have been able to quickly adopt

Video Visit technology to see and speak with patients protecting them from potential contact risks. Schedules were changed so that providers were rotated to keep some physicians and APCs doing video visits from home while others saw all patients in the office. In doing this we were able to limit the risk to providers being infected and similarly keeping patients safe.

None of this would have been possible without the excellent leadership and collaboration of our many caregivers at all levels. Our nurses, medical assistants, patient service representatives, blood draw teams, radiation technologists, and many others have all pitched in to ensure that our patients have been evaluated and treated with respect, courtesy, and skill during this difficult time.

As we move towards reactivation of services, we have learned many lessons that you will see applied in future care of patients. We give a BIG THANK YOU to our team members and leadership, all of whom have proven to be heroes in caring for our cancer patients during this incredible and scary time.

I have no doubt we will find medicines to treat COVID and vaccines to prevent its spread. Most of us predict this will happen in record time despite the losses we have all felt during the past few months.

“ We give a BIG THANK YOU to our team members and leadership, all of whom have proven to be heroes in caring for our cancer patients. ”

Despite all the worry, hardships and sorrow brought on by COVID in the United States and the rest of the world it is critical that people not lose sight of the fact that we will get through this and return to a new level of normalcy.

It’s obvious to me that Annie was right after all: *The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow. Please stay safe and stay well.* ■

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Did you Know?

# Heightened Safety Measures in the Time of COVID-19

By Federico A. Sanchez, MD, System Medical Director, Medical Oncology, Aurora Cancer Care

Very few of us ever thought we would live during a plague, let alone worry about taking care of patients and our families during such a scary event. Regardless as cancer physicians we have been called to rise to the challenges that such a task would require.

The first thought that occurred to Aurora Cancer Care (ACC) leadership was how do we ensure our patients will be safe to continue their cancer treatments during a time in which we all instinctively would choose to stay home and avoid being in public or close to one another.

Our second concern was how to protect physicians, advanced practice providers, nurses, medical staff and all front-line colleagues and their families. It is well known that in all epidemic outbursts the first casualties are the health care providers.

We spent a significant amount of time brainstorming, many times with rapidly changing scientific information, on how to protect all of us.

With patient and caregiver safety always at the top of our minds, we quickly and nimbly made changes to how we deliver care. Some changes you've likely noticed if you've been to one of our cancer clinics:



**Virtual Check-In** for low-contact upon arrival;



**COVID-19 Screening** for everyone who enters our locations;



**Masking of everyone who enters our clinics and hospitals;**



**Enhanced cleaning including additional disinfectant for high-touch areas;**



**Staggered clinic appointment times** to reduce traffic in the clinics;



Rearranged furniture in waiting rooms to support **safe social distances**; and



The final safety measure, unfortunately, had to include drastic social distancing through limiting additional visitors in the clinics. Family support is crucial in the care of our patients, but now with this pandemic, it is also dangerous. Indeed, the biggest sacrifice has been to minimize visitors and family company in our clinics during this time.

How long do we expect this to continue? It is unknown for now, but we expect this to occur for the remainder of this year.

From the physician point of view these changes are not easy. Most of us choose this field of work because we thrive on human interaction. Learning to provide phone visits, video visits, and medical care from a distance has not been easy, but we are willing to do it. So, as we all go through this journey together please bear with us as we all learn the new realities.

As always, ACC is committed to do our best and keep all our patients and providers safe in this time of uncertainty. We will never forget that in our line of work our goal is to treat the sick and to cure and heal the suffering as best we can, both for our patients as well as for our colleagues. May you all stay safe during these troubling times. ■

# Advocate Aurora Health Joins COVID-19 & Cancer Consortium

New crowdsourcing effort aims to better identify the unique effects of COVID-19 on patients with cancer

April 24, 2020

Advocate Aurora Health recently joined the COVID-19 & Cancer Consortium (CCC19), a group of more than 90 institutions across more than 40 states partnering in a new crowdsourcing effort to better identify the unique effects of COVID-19 on patients with cancer or a history of cancer.

Oncologist and hematologist *Michael Thompson, MD, PhD*, serves on the CCC19 steering committee and is co-author of a recent publication in the journal *Nature Cancer* about CCC19 and the ability of crowdsourcing to fill existing knowledge gaps during a medical crisis.

CCC19 is a novel crowdsourcing effort designed to rapidly collect clinical and biologic data from cancer patients and survivors with COVID-19 and quickly disseminate results to participating institutions, all through the use of its cohort study tool, the web-based CCC19 Registry. The survey tool includes four parts: patient demographic information, COVID-19 diagnosis and course of illness, cancer diagnosis and treatment details, and information about the health care professional.

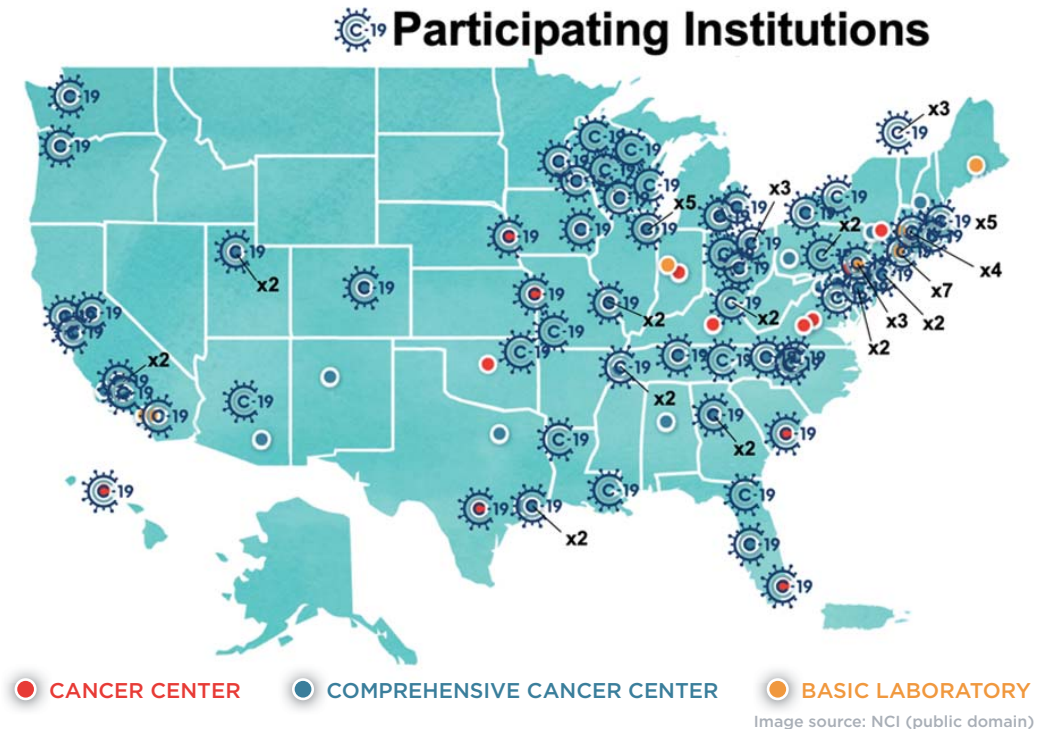
“We hope this crowdsourcing project helps us better understand the scope, severity and related complications from COVID-19 in this uniquely heterogeneous and uniquely vulnerable patient population,” Dr. Thompson said.

## Cancer and coronavirus

There remains a great deal of uncertainty about COVID-19 and its effects on individuals, especially those with underlying health issues and the immunocompromised.

“Patients with cancer are unique in that they may be at higher risk for COVID-19 because many are of advanced age and often immunocompromised with significant underlying health issues that may require treatments which can increase their risk of infection,” said Amy Beres, PhD, director of oncology research for Advocate Aurora Health’s research institute.

## Participating Institutions



More than 90 cancer centers and laboratories have joined the COVID-19 & Cancer Consortium to better identify the unique effects of COVID-19 on patients with cancer or a history of cancer.

At the same time, oncologists are increasingly familiar with crowdsourcing, as the field comprises 7% of all studies involving crowdsourcing in health care. During times of disaster, medical crowdsourcing has been previously applied to patient monitoring, emergency planning, crisis management, social cohesion and research.

Despite a groundswell of recent publications related to COVID-19 – more than 2,000 in the first three months of the outbreak – most studies have been small and relatively limited in scope, according to the authors.

“There is a need for crowdsourcing projects to step in, identify major clinical challenges and quickly supply data to find the most promising solutions,” Dr. Thompson said.

Institutions participating in the voluntary effort are asked to identify and report all cases of COVID-19 in patients – from critically ill to asymptomatic – with a current or prior history of invasive malignancy. Participating institutions are also asked to avoid duplicative data and provide 30- and 90-day outcomes.

For more information on CCC19, visit [ccc19.org](https://ccc19.org) or follow [@COVID19nCCC](https://twitter.com/COVID19nCCC) on Twitter.

To learn more about Advocate Aurora’s research, visit [aurora.org/research](https://aurora.org/research).

# Community Outreach: HPV Education Program Update

By Jennifer Jarvey Balistreri, MS, Community Impact Coordinator Senior, Aurora Cancer Care, and Catherine Schulz, MSN, APNP, ANP-BC, HPV Education Program Champion Provider, Aurora Cancer Care

Every year, thousands of Wisconsinites are exposed to Human Papillomavirus (HPV), some of these infections leading to HPV related cancers. This sexually transmitted infection (STI) is preventable with education, vaccination, and screening.

Aurora Cancer Care (ACC) enters the fourth year of providing HPV education to various urban community audiences, and we are proud to share updates of how our educational program has progressed. Although Wisconsin HPV vaccination rates are slowly rising, there are still glaring gaps in education and vaccination access throughout the state. Only 13 of our 72 counties have reached vaccination rates of 15% or higher for eligible 11-12 year old boys and girls (Wisconsin Cancer Collaborative, 2020). Milwaukee County vaccination completion rates continue to hover around 40%. It is clear more work needs to be done. Our HPV program continues to focus on three essential pieces: to increase the HPV vaccination rate in Milwaukee, to increase the knowledge of HPV contraction,

they believe they have enough HPV vaccination access resources going forward. We also take the opportunity to let students ask anonymous questions of the health care provider present. In 2019, our primary data reflects that 74% of the students knew what HPV was prior to our lesson, yet only 32% knew if they had completed the vaccine, 22% reported they did not have the vaccine series completed and 54% were unsure.

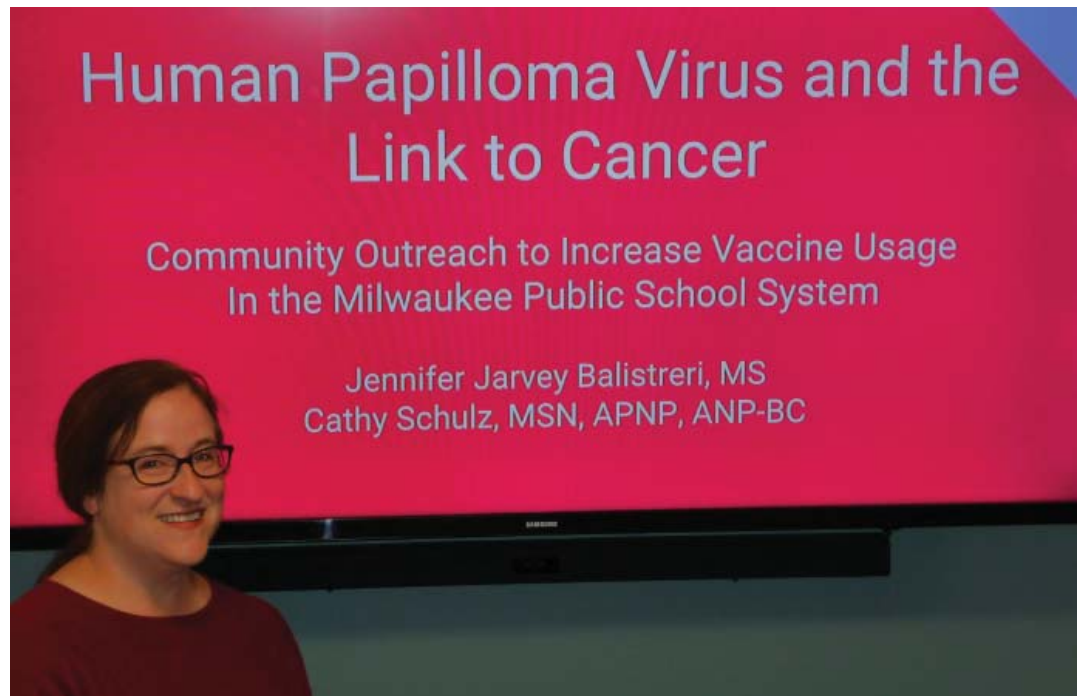
We continue to further our work in 2020 within the city of Milwaukee by collaborating with the Milwaukee Area Sexually Transmitted Infection Strategic Plan Work Groups. This collaboration includes various stakeholders throughout the city including: Milwaukee Public Schools, City of Milwaukee Health Department, AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin, MLK Heritage Health Center, United Way, Diverse and Resilient, city wide urgent care and medical facilities, local colleges and universities, and many more. Two STI workgroups we partner with are working to assure clinical, community coordination and collaboration, as well as partnering to assure access and quality of care for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and education.

In the upcoming years we hope to expand our program throughout the system, as well as expand our audience base to college students and parent audiences too. We have gained additional advanced practitioner HPV educators throughout our system to further this expansion and look forward to partnering with even more academic and community-based organizations. ■

“Aurora Cancer Care (ACC) enters the fourth year of providing HPV education to various urban community audiences, and we are proud to share updates of how our educational program has progressed.”

and impact decision making on safe sex behaviors.

Our work with Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has continued to evolve. Within the last four years, we educated over four thousand MPS freshmen in health education classrooms. We have taken program feedback from students and tailored our presentation and education to their needs. We continue to ask the students questions to ensure the program is taught at a level that could be easily understood, if they know if their HPV vaccination series is completed, and if



HPV Program Champion Provider, Cathy Schulz teaching MPS high school students about HPV.

# Integrative Cancer Care: We've Got Your Back

By Melissa Armstrong, MHA, Program Coordinator, Integrative

Challenging days are a reality for patients and their families from diagnosis through survivorship. Integrative Cancer Care can provide you with much needed comfort and relief. Our staff of integrative oncology trained therapists provide acupuncture, massage and mind-body treatments for you every step of the way, no matter the kind of day you are having, we've got your back.

## Our Promise, Your Safety

COVID 19 has necessitated Integrative Cancer Care to reimagine how we deliver safe and effective care. While we were not able to treat you in person, our team has been reaching out to provide virtual comfort visits with mind-body treatments to support you through a difficult time. Beyond traditional in-person massage and acupuncture treatments, our team focuses on self-care techniques you can do within the safety of your home.

Techniques such as acupressure, aromatherapy, guided imagery, reiki, breathing techniques and more are available. Our massage therapists and acupuncturists create a personalized experience to support and empower you to manage treatment side effects. Our integrative care priority is to not only to provide support, but to bring balance to your life.

You can also manage your health and wellness via the Advocate Aurora LiveWell app. This is one place to learn more about what Advocate Aurora Health offers to make healthy happen.

All users can now access free meditation exercises on relaxation, body scans, focus, breathing techniques and anxiety relief via the LiveWell Advocate Aurora Health App.



## Achieving Well Being and Success in the Clinics

Patients value our services, in 2019 nearly 11,700 patients chose Integrative Cancer Care services. In one year, there was a 23% growth from the 9,000 patient lives touched in 2018. Integrative Medicine acupuncturists and massage therapists are Wisconsin certified/licensed and have completed advanced training in oncology. Our evidence based care has been proven to help patients achieve a

better sense of well-being through improved sleep and a reduction in pain, nausea, stress, and fatigue.

Integrative Oncology is defined as, "patient centered, evidence-informed field of cancer care that utilizes mind body practices, natural products and/or lifestyle modifications from different traditions alongside conventional cancer treatments."<sup>1</sup>

Patients may access our acupuncture and massage services while attending their infusion visits, now embedded into 17 of Aurora's Cancer Clinics.

Thanks to generous philanthropic donations to the Aurora Foundation our accessible and affordable integrative cancer care is available onsite at low or no cost!

To learn more about our program, please visit us at: [www.aurorahealthcare.org/services/integrative-medicine/integrative-cancer-care](http://www.aurorahealthcare.org/services/integrative-medicine/integrative-cancer-care)

Reduced fee acupuncture and private table massage appointments are available at select Aurora Cancer Care Sites. ■



Patient receiving acupuncture during a chemotherapy infusion visit.

Claudia M. Witt, Lynda G. Balneaves, Maria J. Cardoso, Lorenzo Cohen, Heather Greenlee, Peter Johnstone, Ömer Küçük, Josh Mailman, Jun J. Mao, A Comprehensive Definition for Integrative Oncology, JNCI Monographs, Volume 2017, Issue 52, November 2017, Igx012, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jncimonographs/Igx012>

# Managing Your Financial Wellbeing

By Nikki Wachowiak, Supervisor Center for Financial Wellness, Aurora Family Services

**F**inancial Wellbeing can be a challenge for anyone at any time. Tack on the added stress of a global pandemic or a cancer diagnosis, or both, and it can become incredibly overwhelming.

It's difficult to talk about money, but asking for and accepting help with financial management can reduce your level of stress and help you focus on your treatment.

Two important questions to ask about handling the financial aspects of cancer are:

1. What financial impact will my cancer diagnosis and treatment have on my life?
2. Do I have a friend or family member who can help me? If not, ask your doctor to refer you to an Advocate Aurora Oncology Social Worker or to a Financial Navigator for help with managing your financial concerns.

During the emotion-filled time of diagnosis and early treatment, the tendency can be for financial concerns

**Aurora Family Services has a financial wellness program with financial navigators available who can help you with organizing your financial needs. We provide services such as:**

- A comprehensive financial health assessment
- Family financial health coaching
- Budget counseling and planning
- Credit counseling

to take a back seat. Avoidance can lead to even greater anxiety. The strain of being in debt can be tremendous.

It can be tempting not to open bills out of fear or frustration, or to toss them in a box never to be seen again. This will cause difficulties later. It is best to keep up with the bills on at least a monthly basis. While a spending plan may not magically solve all your financial worries, it can do a lot to relieve your financial stress.

If you take an active approach to managing the cost of your cancer care, you're likely to feel more in control. Here are some tips you can start with that may help you:

- Get an accordion folder and label the tabs to help you file things so you can find them quickly and easily.
- Pick a certain day to be "health care bill day." Use this time to work on the task of keeping everything organized. This will help sort information and keep it from taking over your everyday life.
- Enter your expenses into a spreadsheet or notebook.
- Consult with an estate lawyer regarding legal documentation and asset protection, including trusts.

You don't have to have cancer to take advantage of our financial wellness program. Anyone can contact The Center for Financial Wellness and be connected to an experienced financial navigator who can help you design a spending plan that addresses your individual needs and examine your options and priorities for dealing with those needs. It's never too late to call for help! Please contact our office at **414-482-8801** or visit us at [www.creditcounselingwi.org](http://www.creditcounselingwi.org). ■



# Advocate Aurora Providers Climb the Climb

By Carol Huibregtse, RN, MSN, OCN, Manager Clinical Cancer Service Line, Aurora Cancer Care

Each year, team members from across Advocate Aurora Health (AAH) participate in the Fight for Air Climb event hosted by the American Lung Association. This year was no exception. Several AAH team members from all over Wisconsin, including providers from Green Bay, Grafton, and Milwaukee, climbed alongside patients and members of the community to climb the 47 floors of the U.S. Bank Center in Milwaukee for a total of 1034 stairs in the 2020 Fight for Air Climb on March 7, 2020.



(Left to Right) Dr. Raul Mendoza-Ayala, Dr. Yolo Diaz, and personal trainer Junius Ho, all from Green Bay after their successful Fight for Air Climb.

The Fight for Air Climb is an annual event hosted by the American Lung Association (ALA) to raise funds for lung health research, patient education and public policy efforts. According to [www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org), the ALA's "work is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; champion clean air for all; improve the quality of life for those with lung disease and their families; and create a tobacco-free future."

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in men and women in the United States, according to both the **ALA** and the **American Cancer Society**. Aurora Cancer Care diagnosed 1,032 lung cancers in 2019, accounting for

nearly one fourth of all lung cancer diagnosis in the state of Wisconsin. This is due to our largely successful, Lung Cancer Alliance Center of Excellence designated **Low Dose CT Lung Screening Program** available throughout our system.

Aurora Health Care has 14 sites across Wisconsin that perform low dose CT (LDCT) scan lung screening. LDCT is a way of detecting the presence of lung cancer, preferably at an earlier stage. Cancer registry data from 2014-2017 for Aurora Health Care showed a 9% increase in early stage lung cancer (stage 0, I, IIA) and a 7.2% decrease in stage IV cancers.

Thank you to all who participated in the 2020 climb! Join AAH caregivers at the next Fight for Air Climb, currently scheduled for March 2021!

For more information on the LDCT Lung Cancer Screening program go to: [www.aurorahealthcare.org/services/cancer/lung-cancer](http://www.aurorahealthcare.org/services/cancer/lung-cancer) ■



Providers and team members from Grafton and Milwaukee, (left to right) Dr. David Demos, Dr. Phawan Demos, Brienne Porter, Amanda Mueller, Jena Cruciani, Kari Renner, Breanna Pendergast, and Ryan Pendergast.

Annual lung cancer screening is recommended for those patients that are high risk for lung cancer. People with high risk for lung cancer include the following: aged 55-77 years with 30 pack year history; either current smoker or quit within last 15 years. If these high-risk factors apply to you, contact your primary care physician to ask about considering getting a lung cancer screening. If appropriate, they will be able to refer you to the service which is covered by most insurances.



# Aurora Cancer Care Introduces Video Visits

By Corey Shamah, MD, Director of Informatics, Medical Oncology, Aurora Cancer Care

The last few months have seen incredible changes in our health care system. Social distancing and safer at home orders are now part of the landscape. At Aurora Cancer Care, we continue to provide our patients with the excellent care they deserve in these challenging times.

While we are still available in person when you need us, we have introduced video visits to our options of care. Video visits are another way to get medical care from members of your care team. Instead of coming into the office, you'll meet with your provider using video capabilities on your mobile device or computer.

What started out as a primary care pilot program in Manitowoc, was rolled out to the whole organization in March of this year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We adopted this rapidly, and in the month of April, Aurora Cancer Care accomplished almost 500 video visits. Our patients like being able to see their provider without having to leave their home.

The introduction of new technology can often be daunting, but this is very easy to use. All that you need is a smartphone, tablet, or computer with a webcam. Just get the Zoom app, log into the Advocate Aurora Health LiveWell app, enter a few clicks and you are on your way!

When it's time for your video visit, find a quiet, comfortable, private place in your home - or wherever you happen to be - so you can meet with your provider. These visits are safe, secure, and private. Our team is more than happy to answer any of your questions to get you started.

While video visits are helpful, we recognize that there are limitations and certain types of visits (chemotherapy, radiation therapy) need to be done in the clinic. If your provider has decided a video visit is appropriate for your situation, they'll suggest it and schedule one with you. If you'd like to request one yourself, call your provider's office directly to schedule the visit. ■



**Did you know Advocate Aurora Health has over 156,000 cancer survivors?**

**They could fill Miller Park (twice), the United Center and Wrigley Field!**

June 7 was National Cancer Survivors Day, but we celebrate survivors every day!



We are  AdvocateAuroraHealth

[aurora.org/cancercare](http://aurora.org/cancercare)



@Aurora\_Cancer on Twitter

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