

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**COMMUNITY ONCOLOGY CLINIC PROVIDES SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TO PATIENTS**

Oncology Alliance, a regional health care practice that provides cancer care to patients close to home, offers more to patients than medical treatment. In the early years of the practice, the physicians acknowledged that patients' psychosocial and financial issues were a critical component of their cancer care and treatment. Oncology Alliance determined that in order to provide the best care possible to the patient, it needed to offer services to assist patients with all aspects of having cancer, not just the medical and physical.

Oncology Alliance became one of the first community oncology practices in the nation to provide its patients with social work services specifically designed for cancer patients at no charge. Today the Social Work Department at Oncology Alliance consists of four full-time social workers and is a service offered to all patients as well as their family and friends. All four social workers have master's degrees in social work and three of the four are board-certified in oncology social work.

"The social work services at Oncology Alliance are invaluable," said Brad Zimmerman, oncology social worker at Oncology Alliance. "Not only does it allow the physicians to focus on treating the cancer, but research has shown the psychosocial status of a patient can have effects on how that patient responds to treatment. If the patient is not in good mental health at the time of treatment, there can be set backs and unanticipated side-effects. For example, it's really hard to focus on treatment when you're not sure how you are going to afford food for the week."

According to Zimmerman, basic living expenses are just one of the many issues the social workers help patients with on a daily basis. Some of the others include financial problems with medical bills and insurance coverage, medication costs, employment, emotional support and treatment decisions.

A seasoned Milwaukeean and a true Wisconsinite, is how resident Sandra Amiro describes herself. Amiro has lived in Milwaukee her whole life, which is one of the reasons she turned to community oncology clinic, Oncology Alliance, when she was diagnosed with colon cancer in Feb. 2008.

When Amiro started her treatment, she had to go on disability leave from her radiology job at St. Luke's Medical Center. The medication costs combined with insurance issues and a smaller paycheck had Sandra really struggling to make ends meet. Her nurse at Oncology Alliance referred her to the Social Work Department, where she connected with Zimmerman.

“When I was diagnosed with cancer I had no idea where to start, there is so much to worry about,” said Amiro. “As part of my treatment, I needed injections that were very expensive and my insurance would only pay a small amount of the cost. Brad got me in touch with a patient advocate fund that issues grants and I was able to get a grant that covered the cost difference. Because of Brad’s help, I no longer had to be concerned about how I was going to pay my bills.”

One of the most common problems facing cancer patients is the cost of treatment. If a patient’s physician prescribes a medication that is not covered by insurance or is too costly, the social workers at Oncology Alliance work with different industry and community resources to find ways to get the necessary medication for the patient. “Having a strong background in oncology social work and an understanding of the local resources available to our patients is what allows us to help our patients and their friends and family remain positive as they go through this difficult time,” said Zimmerman.

“Brad was so sweet and genuine, I really felt like someone was in my corner,” said Amiro. “He really listened and heard me out, and if he doesn’t have a solution or answer he finds one, he has been such a help to me.”

Oncology Alliance is the largest private practice of oncology and hematology specialists in the greater Milwaukee area. Oncology Alliance’s 19 physicians provide care to patients from 11 locations in Southeastern Wisconsin. They are supported by a multidisciplinary team of 230 employees, including oncology nurses who are specially trained in oncology and hematology care and numerous other clinical specialists. For more information about Oncology Alliance, contact Mike Koroscik at (414) 778-4300 or go to [www.oncologyalliance.com](http://www.oncologyalliance.com).

**Follow-up questions or interview requests can be sent to Mike Koroscik at Oncology Alliance or Marci Gehrke at The Roberts Group.**

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