

Cutting-Edge Cancer Care with a Personal Touch

Research-based medicine and an integrative care model deliver hopeful outcomes at Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers.

When it comes to cancer care that delivers an advanced academic basis with a personalized, patient-centered approach, medical oncologist Clayton Polowy, M.D., notes that actions speak louder than words. “Here, patients can see and feel every day that our collaborative team not only delivers the most advanced medicine, but that we genuinely care about their entire experience and outcomes,” he says.

Compassion precedes everything, even as patients undergo evaluation to assess their symptoms. At the time of an initial diagnosis, Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers staff recognizes the seismic shift that occurs in a patient’s life.

“A cancer diagnosis can be a bit like getting in a car accident. You know the possibility exists, but you never get into your car in the morning expecting it to happen to you. It is traumatic. And one moment in time—one test result—can be life changing,” says Dr. Polowy. “We recognize that moment as an opportunity to provide comfort and confidence to a patient in a situation that is extremely overwhelming.”

The Integrative Approach

Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers’ integrative approach incorporates perspectives

from a diverse provider team (including genetic counselors, medical and radiation oncologists, and surgeons), as well as complementary services—such as yoga, meditation, support groups, and nutritional guidance—to smooth the cancer journey. Every team member plays a unique and essential role in creating a patient experience that is both seamless and effective.

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Because all services are offered under one roof, patients are spared the hassle of trekking across town to coordinate various specialist appointments. The practice’s large

size and deep network of providers also ensure patients can assess the specialists that best fit their needs.

“Our size and convenience allow us to deliver care more efficiently,” says Dr. Polowy. “When I want to connect a patient with another provider on our team, I can just walk them down the hall. The patient-provider connection is extremely important, and this is one more way we can make that connection personal.”

Better Treatment Experiences

After nearly two decades in the field, Dr. Polowy is still driven to find and implement the newest and most effective treatments for his patients, many whom he partners with for years of ongoing treatment and monitoring. It’s a passion he shares with his colleagues throughout Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers.

“Most recently, we have implemented immunotherapy treatments that deliver less toxicity, require fewer treatment cycles, are tolerated better, and can be as effective as, or more effective than, traditional chemotherapy. It’s extremely rewarding to be able to offer that to patients,” says Dr. Polowy.

“As physicians, we can’t always control the outcomes of a patient’s treatment, but we can always provide our compassion, empathy, and sympathy,” he continues. “That’s what keeps us doing what we do.”

Collaborative Breast Care Saves Lives

Even before a diagnosis, Ironwood Women’s Centers help patients combat cancer.

Though modern medicine has evolved tremendously to fight breast cancer, the best plan of attack is still prevention—and that’s exactly where care begins at Ironwood Women’s Centers.

“With a simple genetic test using a blood or saliva sample, we can assess a patient’s lifetime risk,” says genetic counselor Mandy Kass. “We also create a thorough family history, called a pedigree, that guides us in evaluating the risk and potential severity of a woman’s cancer chances.”

The standard age to begin mammograms is 40, though Kass recommends earlier screenings if warranted by family history. “We want to start screenings 10 years earlier than the youngest diagnosis in a patient’s family tree. If a patient’s mother was diagnosed at 45, we want to start screenings for the patient at age 35.”

Once risk has been determined, a personalized prevention plan might include more frequent screenings, preventative medicine, or a double mastectomy. Even when cancer isn’t prevented entirely, catching it in its earliest stages can be life-saving. Genetic testing can help inform the most strategic and personalized approach for treatment.

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we work closely to integrate the entire care plan for the most convenient, effective treatment,” says Kass. “From an emotional standpoint, this is where our team really shines.”

Ironwood Women’s Centers’ unique integrative care model draws on the expertise of multiple providers: genetic counselors, medical and radiation oncologists, breast surgeons, dietitians, and even social workers.

“We do an enormous amount of collaborative pre-op planning,” says breast surgeon Patricia Clark, M.D., FACS. “Speeding up the process with a detailed road map reduces a patient’s anxiety because they know what’s coming. It’s just one way we’re delivering precision medicine.”

Breast-Saving Strategies

Because the breasts are an intimate part of a woman’s identity, Dr. Clark approaches surgery with an impeccable level of care, compassion, and expertise. “Traditional

methods can result in breast disfiguration, but we’ve adopted a new technique called oncoplastic surgery that combines plastic surgery techniques with oncologic surgery to reduce the need for a mastectomy and avoid deformities from a lumpectomy,” she says.

One of the newest reconstructive techniques involves removing tissue from the lower abdomen to replace the tissue in the breast following a mastectomy. Combined with nipple-sparing techniques, nerves can be preserved and blood vessels are grafted directly into the chest’s arteries, restoring a natural look, feel, and often sensation to the breasts while avoiding implants.

“This reconstruction can last 40 years, and patients are thrilled with it. Best of all, there’s no risk of the breast cancer returning within the breast mound because the tissue still remembers it is abdominal fat,” says Dr. Clark.

While survival is certainly the highest priority when diagnosing and treating breast cancer, Ironwood Women’s Centers also prioritizes the quality-of-life experience during and after a woman has conquered the disease.

“A cancer diagnosis can change a patient’s life, but by catching it early and dealing with it effectively, we want it to be just a small blip in an otherwise normal life,” says Dr. Clark. “Our job is to restore as much life, control, normality, and confidence to each patient as possible.”



Clayton Polowy, M.D.



Ironwood Cancer
& Research Centers

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Patricia Clark, M.D., FACS



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Mandy Kass, MS, CGC