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The Valley-Mount Sinai Comprehensive Cancer Care Sexual Health Clinic

The Request: The Valley Hospital Foundation respectfully requests support for the establishment of a sexual health clinic for cancer survivors and thrivers at Valley-Mount Sinai Comprehensive Cancer Care. Sexual health is defined as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.” Studies show that anywhere from 20 to 100% of cancer survivors experience a sexual issue that can occur even years after diagnosis, but sexual health is often overlooked in cancer survivorship care.

Multiple cancer treatments can impact sexual function. Cancer surgery can cause body image concerns, loss of sensation, and lymphedema. Chemotherapy, radiation, and targeted therapy can result in premature menopause, genitourinary syndrome of menopause, hair loss that can affect body image, treatment-related weight gain, fatigue, neuropathy, and pelvic floor problems, among others. A cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatments impact one’s mental health which also plays a role in arousal, orgasm, libido, body image and interpersonal relationships with a partner. Sexual health programs are typically only found in large academic cancer centers, such as Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. A sexual health program at Valley would allow us to address an unmet need, serve our patients and would be one of its kind in a community hospital setting.

Funding would support education, training and outreach programs for key staff members about the impacts of cancer treatment on sexual health; a space where patients can be assessed based on the symptoms they experience and receive medications and supplies; and the services of a sex therapist, either in an in-person or virtual format.

Background: Patients who undergo chemotherapy and radiation for a variety of cancer types often experience changes to their sexual health. These changes impact patients of all ages, including women and men. Often, cancer patients have already spent significant amounts of money on deductibles, medications, and long-term treatments, and sexual health is often neglected because patients do not have the finances to pay for a sex therapist or other services. Currently, patients at Valley’s Cancer Center have access to a sex therapist at a cost, and the proposed grant funding would be used to offset this expense, as well as create a program that addresses sexual health in a biopsychosocial model (focusing on biologic factors such as vaginal dryness and pain with intercourse, psychologic factors such as body image and mental health contributing to sexual dysfunction and social factors such as optimizing interpersonal relationships).

Negative changes in sexual health have proven to be one of the most distressing side effects of cancer treatment, causing patients anxiety, depression, fear, and loss of intimacy with their partners.



Case for Support: Sexual Health Clinic Supporting Cancer Survivors

The sex therapist would work with individuals and couples to counsel them on how to recreate the intimacy that is lost to cancer and can significantly impact quality of life.

The creation of a dedicated sexual health clinic at Valley would undoubtedly improve the survivorship experience and quality of life for our patients.