

## Oncology clinic keeps patients home

Written by Elizabeth Barrett  
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AWAIS

### **GMH one of several outreach centers**

No one wants to hear a diagnosis of cancer.

If it happens, Gothenburg Memorial Hospital and Callahan Cancer Center staff want patients to be as comfortable as possible.

Which could mean not having to travel long distances for treatment or consultation, according to Dr. Ahmed Awais.

Awais, who specializes in hematology and oncology, is a physician at the Callahan Center which is part of Great Plains Regional Medical Center.

The doctor started seeing patients Monday at GMH which is now one of eight outreach oncology clinics serviced by Awais, two other oncologists and a radiation/oncologist at the center.

“We discovered we were seeing a lot of patients from small towns close to North Platte,” Awais said about the development of the clinics. “Now they don’t have to travel.”

Awais will be available to patients locally once a month unless volume increases.

In the meantime, four local registered nurses—Cassie Hilbers, Phil Miller, Ashley Groene and Jena Ziemba—are trained in the administration of chemo therapy and other intravenous therapy

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in a specially-equipped room at the hospital.

In addition to seeing patients with cancer, Awais said the oncologists also treat people for non-cancerous blood disorders like anemia or blood clots.

Awais acknowledged that certain areas of the Midwest, including Nebraska, are known as the lymphoma belt.

Although there is no clear-cut proof, he said there seems to be an association between cancer and exposure to insecticides and pesticides that may make people predisposed to specific leukemias, lymphomas and even solid tumors.

The native of Pakistan received a medical degree from Aga Khan University in Pakistan before moving to the United States in 2005 and receiving post-graduate training in internal medicine at the University of Texas-Houston and in hematology/oncology at Baylor College of Medicine.

Outside of the office, he enjoys field sports like soccer, cricket, tennis and mountain hiking. He likes reading, chess, computers and photography.

GMH chief nursing officer Carolyn Evenson said the hospital offered chemotherapy on a limited basis about 20 years ago before cancer centers became more prevalent.

Evenson agreed that the ability for patients to be treated locally will be much more convenient for patients who sometimes travel half an hour to a full hour or more away six days in a row for consultation and treatment.

“Cancer patients are weary and weak—chemotherapy can be hard on the circulatory system,” she said. “They expressed an interest to be closer to home during treatments.”

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Plans are in the works to make the intravenous therapy room more comfortable, she said, with input from GMH nurse Cindy Fisher who is battling ovarian cancer and is treated with chemotherapy.

Evenson said patients taking chemo are often light sensitive. As a result, GMH plans to install remote-control mini blinds and more comfortable recliners.

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