

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute Delivers ‘Simple Immediate Impact’ to Patient Comfort Using Weighted Blankets

Healthcare organizations as far as Japan and Australia have expressed interest in replicating the program.

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Over the past three years, Irma Pascarella has gratefully accepted a warmed cotton blanket from her care team for added comfort during weekly chemotherapy treatments for breast cancer at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute – Merrimack Valley in Methuen. When offered a new weighted blanket during a recent appointment, her curiosity turned to amazed appreciation.

“When they put it on me, my anxiety instantly drained away. I felt a sense of calm, peace, security, and deep relaxation,” said 82-year-old Pascarella, who lives in North Andover. “The blanket isn’t heavy, but the weight makes such a difference that now I always ask for one. Dana-Farber is all about the patients, not just treatments, and I appreciate all the ways they find to keep us comfortable.”

Weighted blankets are available to patients receiving infusions at all [Dana-Farber locations](#) as the result of a project led by staff nurse Cheri Hermann, BSN, RN, OCN. The initiative dates to March 2020, when she observed heightened anxiety in patients whose loved ones were unable to accompany them to appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Not only had [patients] been diagnosed with cancer, but they were also dealing with fear and anxiety around COVID-19 all alone,” recalled Hermann. “Their anxiety was off the charts. It really broke my heart.”

After reading about the benefits of weighted blankets, Hermann teamed with colleagues in 2022 to purchase medical-grade weighted blankets which adhere to infection control guidelines through a grant from the [Friends of Dana-Farber Cancer Institute](#). She then designed a project to evaluate the use of weighted blankets with support from clinical inquiry specialist Terri Jabaley Leonarczyk, PhD, RN, OCN, of the Phyllis F. Cantor Center for Research in Nursing and Patient Care Services at Dana-Farber. The Cantor Center promotes nurse-led innovation by supporting scientifically sound approaches to solving clinical problems and implementing innovative ideas that help reduce the burdens of cancer.

The results of the project showed how patients' anxiety during infusion treatments eased when using weighted blankets of varying sizes – with the most dramatic reductions occurring during the first visit. The blankets were subsequently put into use throughout Dana-Farber.

“I had no idea that something so simple would make such an immediate impact,” Hermann said. “When we put a weighted blanket around a patient, their whole expression changes. It’s like giving them a big hug and letting them know we’ve got you. Things are going to be ok.”

Healthcare organizations as far as Japan and Australia have expressed interest in replicating the program since results were shared with regional and national nursing organizations within the U.S., presented at an interdisciplinary oncology conference in China, and published in the June 2024 issue of Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing. Hermann is especially hopeful the addition of warmed weighted blankets could lead to a new standard of oncology care, especially for those enduring scalp cooling to help prevent hair loss during chemotherapy treatment.

“From the beginning, my motivation has simply been to help patients feel better. It warms my heart that more people will get the opportunity for added comfort during a very difficult time in their cancer journey,” said Hermann, adding that she is “thrilled and humbled” that other patients around the world may soon benefit from the same “Dana-Farber difference.”

“This is a powerful example of an important advancement in nursing practice that benefits patients and was achieved through collaboration between Dana-Farber’s clinical nurses and nurse scientists,” said Anne Gross, PhD, RN, FAAN, Senior Vice President, Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer at Dana-Farber.

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