



Cheerful Heart Newsletter

“A cheerful heart is good medicine...” Proverbs 17:22

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Lake County Montana

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Polson oncology clinic will remain open

by Caryl Perdaems, Chief Administrative Officer, St. Joseph Medical Center

“There has been information shared in the community that St. Joseph Medical Center- Oncology Clinic is closing,” Caryl Perdaems says, “but the center will remain open and continue providing high quality service to cancer patients.”

There will be a change in physician staffing beginning August 2026. Montana Cancer Specialists physicians have been contracting services with St. Joe’s for many years; however, due to recent retirements, they will need to discontinue outreach to Polson this summer. In response, St. Joe’s has secured alternative physician coverage through a partnership with Intermountain Health, which is a nationally recognized cancer program. The details of this arrangement are currently being finalized, and patients are expected to be notified in May.

Additionally, services at St. Joe’s will be expanded to multiple days, making it easier for patients in Polson to access care. All current nursing staff and pharmacy care will remain local as well.

“We will be working closely with Dr. Mike Snyder and the Montana Cancer Specialists,” says Caryl Perdaems, “for a smooth transition for area patients who want to keep their care close to home. We are excited to keep oncology open at St. Joe’s!”

Oncology workforce shortage

by Devin Huntley, Chief Operating Officer, St. Luke Healthcare

The United States is facing a growing oncology workforce shortage driven by rising cancer incidence, an aging population, and a wave of physician retirements. Estimates suggest a current shortfall of roughly 2,000–3,000 oncologists, with projections reaching 2,200–3,800 by 2035, and potentially higher under worst-case scenarios. At the same time, demand for oncology services is expected to increase by more than 40 percent, fueled by nearly two million new cancer diagnoses annually and increasing care complexity.

Compounding the issue are high burnout rates—approaching 60 percent in some reports—and a workforce in which nearly one in five physicians is nearing retirement (*Medicushcs, NP Now, CureToday, Barton Associates*).

Rural Community Impact

The impact of this shortage will be felt most acutely in rural communities, where workforce distribution is already severely imbalanced. Although roughly 20 percent of Americans live in rural areas, only about three percent of oncologists practice there, and projections suggest rural regions may meet as little as

29 percent of oncology demand in coming years, compared to a relative surplus in urban areas (*Oncology News Central, Barton Associates*). As a result, rural oncology programs—often dependent on one or two physicians—are particularly vulnerable to staffing disruptions, leading to program closures, consolidation into larger health systems, and increased reliance on alternative care models.

Tele-oncology

Tele-oncology is emerging as a key strategy, enabling remote consultations, virtual tumor boards, and closer collaboration with urban cancer centers, helping extend specialist expertise into underserved areas.

At the same time, advanced practice providers (APPs), including nurse practitioners, are playing an increasingly central role in delivering oncology care, improving access, supporting care continuity, and helping offset physician shortages.

These novel approaches are expected to be critical in stabilizing rural cancer care delivery and mitigating widening disparities in access and outcomes (*Oncology News Central, NP Now, Barton Associates*).

St. Luke Healthcare to hire full-time oncology nurse practitioner

In August St. Luke Healthcare will have a full-time experienced oncology advanced nurse practitioner on staff. Oncology care is offered five days a week at St. Luke.

Finished with treatment — now what ?

The goal of the Rural Cancer Navigation Community Health Care Worker Project is to train workers to connect with cancer survivors who have completed treatment and help them transition to a normal healthy lifestyle.

Assistant professor of College Nursing at Montana State University, Marg Hammersla, is managing the project. Meghan McGrath, DNP (Doctor of Nurse Practitioner) at Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute in Great falls, wrote the curriculum for the seven-week Cancer Healthcare Workers training.

Sharon McGuire, Cheerful Heart Volunteer Coordinator, is currently being trained to work with Lake County cancer patients who have finished treatment. When Sharon is fully trained she will connect with patients who have completed treatment.

Contact Cheerful Heart at (406) 883-3070 for more information.

Support Group welcomes anyone affected by cancer



Matthew Connolly

Cheerful Heart’s Cancer Support Group is open to anyone affected by cancer and meets twice monthly on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month from 10 to 11 a.m. in the Leahy Conference Room on the third floor of St. Joseph Medical Center.

The group leader, Matthew Connolly, welcomes those recently diagnosed, those undergoing treatment, cancer survivors, and/or family members. The group aims to provide a safe place for members to share, learn, support, and encourage members after a cancer diagnosis; and, to conquer the fear in themselves and others. Confidentiality is practiced, anything spoken in group stays with the group.

Gatherings are informal allowing folks to drop-in when schedules and life permits.

Cancer News

- **E.P.A. Moves to Weaken Limits on a Cancer-Causing Gas...** The gas, ethylene oxide, plays a crucial role in sterilizing medical devices. But long-term exposure is linked to several types of cancer and other ailments. ... [\(read\)](#)
 - **Mayo Clinic latest cancer news...**[\(read\)](#)
 - **Wildfire Smoke Link:** Recent reports from American Association for Cancer Research link exposure to wildfire smoke with an increased risk of several cancers. [\(read\)](#)
 - **Microplastics:** A study revealed that microplastics were found in 90 percent of tested prostate cancer tumors, containing 2.5 times more plastic than healthy tissue. Reported by MD Anderson... [\(read\)](#)
-(For an electronic newsletter with live links send an email to valindy47@gmail.com.).....

Cheerful Heart, Inc. offers free non-medical services to Lake County cancer patients currently in treatment by using dedicated volunteers. Cheerful Heart is funded by donations from individuals, organizations and businesses. All funds are used in Lake County. We need your support, both monetarily and as a volunteer. To help us, clip and mail the form below to Cheerful Heart.

Cheerful Heart Support

Name _____ Telephone _____

Mailing address _____

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Receive an electronic newsletter by sending your email address to valindy47@gmail.com

Donation amount _____

I would like to be a Cheerful Heart volunteer. Please mark volunteer services that interest you.

Transporting ___ Serving Soup at clinic on Tuesdays ___ Meal preparation ___ Running errands ___

Light house and yard work ___ Other _____

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Cheerful Heart, P.O. Box 688, Polson, MT 59860 ~ 406-883-3070 ~ cheartinc@gmail.com ~ www.cheerfulheart.org