

# Expanded medication assistance program increases access to cancer medications

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New cancer medications cost an average of \$10,000 per month, but experts at The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center - Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute are finding innovative ways to expand their financial assistance program so more patients have access to the medications they need. Credit: The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center

The Medical Assistance Program at The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center—Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute (OSUCCC—James) has helped more than 30,000 patients gain access to vital medications valued at more than \$500 million, and a new program expansion will further increase access to vital cancer therapies for patients with the greatest financial need.

"Financial toxicity is a very real concern for families facing a [cancer diagnosis](#). As an institution, we want to do all that we can to reduce additional stressors for patients so they can focus on getting well," explains Julie Kennerly-Shah, PharmD, a pharmacist and associate director of [pharmacy](#) at the OSUCCC—James. "Our financial counselors work with patients so they don't have to make decisions about whether they can afford potentially life-saving treatment."

In February 2019 the pharmacy assistance program expanded with the implementation of a drug repository program that allows patients to donate no-longer-needed oral cancer therapy drugs for the benefit of other cancer patients through new state rules spearheaded by the State of Ohio Board of Pharmacy and OSUCCC—James.

"In cancer, it is quite common for patients to switch to a new medication or experience a medication dose reduction. As a result, we end up with a lot of wasted medication that must be disposed of," explains Kennerly-Shah. "This new program allows patients to donate these unneeded medications for re-dispensing to patients in financial need through our existing hospital-based Medical Assistance Program."

New rules adopted in November 2019 by the State of Ohio Board of Pharmacy states donated medications must be within expiration dates, stored as prescribed and otherwise untampered with. Pharmacists will then go through an eight-point inspection of the drug to ensure that it is

safe to re-dispense at a future date to patients in need. Previous rules allowed only for the collection of unopened medication that was dispensed for the prescribed patient but never picked up.

The cancer drug repository initiative is a new component of the overall Medical Assistance Program (MAP) at the OSUCCC—James. The MAP consult service was established to help patients who are unable to afford their medications due to financial hardship. The program consists of pharmacists, medical assistance program coordinators, clinical financial case managers and other support personnel who work one-on-one with patients to reduce healthcare costs associated with cancer treatment.



A new program at The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center -Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute allows patients to donate unneeded oral cancer pills so they can be re-dispensed

to patients who might otherwise not be able to afford their medication. Credit: The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center

"Ohio State has been a leader in [medication](#)-assistance programs and has taught many people across the country how to optimize various manufacturer programs and grant programming. We want to be an asset to other hospitals considering implementation of a cancer drug repository as well," adds Kennerly-Shah. "Our hope is that our repository is a first step toward a much bigger solution long-term that could be modeled beyond our individual hospital and state."

The OSUCCC—James is the first hospital in Ohio, and among the first in the United States, to launch a cancer drug repository program. The new [cancer drug](#) repository program is housed at the OSUCCC—James Outpatient Pharmacy. The [program](#) will accept donations of unused medications from individual patients, pharmacies, hospitals and non-profit clinics to be re-dispensed to patients in treatment at the OSUCCC—James who cannot afford the cost of the medications. Patients interested in donating non-expired, no-longer-needed capecitabine or temozolomide should contact the OSUCCC—James Outpatient Pharmacy.

Provided by Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center

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