

SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

[Here's why I believe in community care](#)

By Scott Herbert

September 16, 2023

For the past 17 years, I have been dedicated to treating New Mexicans with cancer. I'm committed to my work, but above all — I'm dedicated to my patients and physician partners.

I am also committed to enhancing health care availability for New Mexicans by ensuring sustainable access to high-value medical services that are affordable and convenient. To uphold these values, my colleagues and I faced a tough choice at the beginning of the year: to step away from the hospital environment and create an independent, diverse medical group focused on delivering comprehensive multispecialty care. Although not free of risks, the reasoning behind launching our practice, Nexus Health, was compelling.

Here's the rationale: Opening a community care model allows physicians the ability to exercise their independence beyond the hospital setting. Nationwide, community care consistently and conveniently offers patients cost-effective and high-value health care solutions. This also empowers patients with the freedom to select their care provider based on their needs and proximity. This is one more way to bring care closer to the patient. Among our chief objectives is expediting patient access to physicians and reducing wait times for appointments, ensuring swift and efficient medical attention — and doing it all at a fraction of the cost compared to the traditional hospital setting.

Our timing was not by coincidence; we are all lucky to be living in an age of advanced medical care that allows patients to maintain their daily routines while receiving treatment. As an oncologist, I can attest that cancer care today is highly specialized, and it is important to me that my patients receive timely access to the newest state-of-the-art treatment close to home, at an affordable price.

To advance this aim, Nexus Health has chosen to partner with a national organization, giving our patients access to clinical trials and peer-to-peer expertise across the country.

When my patients come to my practice, they have a specialized and highly coordinated care team to make sure the patient comes first and that we achieve the best outcome possible. Equally important, being able to afford medically necessary treatments can significantly improve patient outcomes. Studies show that over a quarter of cancer patients delay medical care, go without care or make changes to their treatment because of cost.

Affordability is always top of mind, and in the community setting, we not only focus on limiting drug toxicity but the financial toxicity patients endure. Studies have proven that chemotherapy treatments cost 71% more in a hospital than in a community setting. By reducing the cost of care, community oncology can help expand access to innovative treatments that they otherwise might not be able to afford. New cancer drug development is rapidly on the rise, giving patients access to new targeted drug therapies, immunotherapies, radiation techniques and focused cancer therapies delivered by radiologists. Because independent practices are able to keep costs relatively low, we are uniquely situated to reduce out-of-pocket costs for patients for these critical services.

In short, community practices have a transformative impact on our state's health care landscape. This year, over 11,000 New Mexicans are expected to receive a cancer diagnosis. It's essential we protect these patients' access to effective, quality care in their local communities and encourage competition. When patients have the freedom to select their care provider and receive high-value, cost-effective treatment close to home in the community setting, everyone wins.