

# Cutting edge clinical cancer trials open at TMH Cancer Center

Karen Russell, M.D., Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Published 1:44 p.m. ET Oct. 3, 2017 | Updated 6:25 p.m. ET Oct. 3, 2017



(Photo: Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare)

As the most diagnosed cancer in Tallahassee, breast cancer has made its mark on the community. But, Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare is fighting back.

From expert care and powerful treatment options to various support services and an international network of clinical trials, the Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center is packing a punch against breast cancer.

Paving the way for progress, clinical trials provide the opportunity for patients to receive new and cutting edge treatments, with the benefit of finding better ways to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer. With the ability to enroll in international and national clinical trials, current and future patients can benefit from research here in our own community.

Clinical trials are only a small part of the larger research component that goes into developing a new treatment or finding a cure. For example, drugs of the future first have to be discovered or created, purified, described and tested in labs before ever reaching human clinical trials. On average, a new cancer drug is studied for at least six years before it even makes it to clinical trials. But the major holdup in making new cancer drugs

available is how long it takes to complete clinical trials themselves. It takes an average of eight years from the time a cancer drug enters a trial until it's approved.

**Map:** [#GoPinkLemonade stands \(http://data.tallahassee.com/pink/\)](http://data.tallahassee.com/pink/)

**More:** [#GoPinkLemonade for Breast Cancer awareness Wednesday \(/story/news/2017/10/03/gopinklemonade-breast-cancer-awareness-wednesday/726882001/\)](http://story/news/2017/10/03/gopinklemonade-breast-cancer-awareness-wednesday/726882001/)

To be sure it's safe and effective, researchers look at each new treatment in several different studies. Only certain people are eligible to take part in each clinical trial. And cancer clinical trials take years to complete. It takes months, if not years, to see if a cancer treatment works in any one person. And figuring out if a drug really improves survival can take a very long time.

The biggest barrier to completing clinical trials is that not enough people take part in them (fewer than five percent of adults). But clinical trials are much more commonly used to treat children with cancer. In fact, 60 percent of children under age 15 participate in clinical trials. This is one reason why survival rates for childhood cancer have increased so dramatically in the last few decades.

This October marks one year since clinical trials were opened and available to adults in our community at the Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center. Leading the charge, Karen Russell, MD, FACP, hematologist/oncologist was recruited to Tallahassee Memorial to help launch the program and expand on research for the Cancer Center.

"As a community cancer center, we hope and plan to eventually offer a robust program that really matches that of an academic institution," said Dr. Russell. "We will be proud to bring this level of research to Tallahassee."

Currently, the facility has an open trial for newly found triple negative breast cancer. A diagnosis of triple negative breast cancer means the three most common types of receptors known to fuel most breast cancer growth (estrogen, progesterone, and the HER-2/neu gene) are not present. Since the tumor lacks the necessary receptors, common treatments are ineffective. This particular study is reviewing treatment to determine if adding one more drug to the patient's plan of care will keep the cancer from growing, or coming back as quickly.

With one in eight women being diagnosed with breast cancer, this staggering statistic rings true to the many women, and even few men, diagnosed in the capital city. It's those future advancements in healthcare, like clinical trials and research, which offers hope to patients.

With a bright future ahead, the Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center plans to offer a trial for every major cancer type in the coming years. Currently, the Cancer Center is working to open a trial for hormone receptor positive patients that studies the use of a new oral medication after surgery. The study investigates the side effect profile of the drug and the ability for this drug to stop the cancer from growing or coming back. Enrollment for this trial will be

open in early 2018.

If you're looking to participate or learn more about clinical trials available at the Tallahassee Memorial Cancer Center, visit [TMH.ORG/CancerTrials](http://www.TMH.ORG/CancerTrials) (<http://www.TMH.ORG/CancerTrials>).

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