Keeping the flu in check

Though numbers are up, hospital stays on schedule

Health officials are calling it an epidemic, and staff and physicians at the region’s premier academic medical center agree this winter’s flu outbreak is more vicious than usual.

During a normal winter day, no more than 10 patients are hospitalized at The University of Kansas Hospital with flu and flu-like symptoms. On Jan. 8 there were 49.

“These numbers of flu patients are earlier than normal and in higher numbers than normal,” said Chief Medical Officer Lee Norman, MD. “It’s one of the worst flu surges I have seen in my eight years here.”

Despite the increase, Norman said the hospital has maintained its schedule of surgeries and elective procedures. The facility is well-supplied with masks and personal protective equipment, testing supplies, Tamiflu and other medications.

“We have plans in place to handle this type of patient influx when we have our normal high patient census,” he said.

Like most areas of the country, our hospital primarily is seeing the type A strain (H3N2). It is the strain for which the current vaccine is only half as effective as expected – due to “genetic drift” of the virus.

Even so, the vaccine remains the best protection against the flu and its complications; it’s not too late in the season to receive it. Most inpatients at our hospital with the flu had not been vaccinated, Norman said.

He also urged people to remember the basics of good hygiene: cover sneezes and coughs with the inside of the elbow, and perform repeated and thorough hand-washing.

Also, people should stay home if they notice flu symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, diarrhea and vomiting.

On the heels of last summer’s Ebola scare, this winter serves as a reminder the “plain old flu” – which claims about 30,000 U.S. lives per year – remains a more pressing health concern. With that in mind, the hospital this season required all its employees to receive the flu vaccine.

By the Numbers: Patients needing care

To suggest a By the Numbers, email Advances@kumc.edu.

More patients come to The University of Kansas Hospital for care – especially during the winter months. This winter looks to be the busiest yet for patients and staff.

875 Total “Patients in a Bed”* on Dec 17, 2014, second only to 890 on July 23, 2014.

Average daily number of Patients in a Bed

<table>
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<th>Month</th>
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<th>2013</th>
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<td>537</td>
<td>581</td>
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Total Patients in a Bed 2015

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<tr>
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<th>Patients</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>844</td>
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Events

► Silent auction for medical trips – The annual KUMC International Outreach silent auction is 5-8 p.m. Friday, Jan. 16, in the School of Nursing Atrium. The event includes food, beer and wine, music and a variety of auction items: college sports memorabilia, jewelry, art and much more. Cost is $5 suggested donation. All proceeds support medical student trips to provide healthcare in Guatemala and Panama.

► Mind-body balance – Chronic illness affects your mind and body. Whether it is physical pain or emotional distress, learn to tolerate and regulate symptoms to live a more healthy and effective life. The class, which also identifies which coping skills work best for you, is 5:30-7 p.m. Monday, Jan. 19, at Medical Plaza North in North Kansas City. Call 913-574-0900 to register.

► Help for sensitive eaters – For those struggling with IBD, Crohn’s or ulcerative colitis. Receive tips to manage your disease by excluding foods you can’t digest. Learn to keep a food journal and go home with nourishing recipes that are easy on your digestive system. (Enjoy tasty samples, too!) The class is 6-7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 21, at Turning Point: The Center for Hope and Healing in Leawood. Call 913-574-0900 to register.

► Quiet the fearful mind – Do you imagine all the “what ifs” of your illness? Learn mindfulness-based tools to quiet the mind and step out of fearful thoughts. Create a new experience of not just living, but thriving, in the face of challenge. The class is 1-2:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 26, at Turning Point: The Center for Hope and Healing in Leawood. Call 913-574-0900 to register.

More events are at kumc.com/event-detail.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Oncology rehab: More quality of life

As cancer survivor rates climb, so too does the need for ongoing patient rehabilitation.

Specialists in oncology rehabilitation help patients and survivors address a host of issues, from stress and cancer-related fatigue to gait abnormalities and chewing impairments.

“More than 11 million people in the United States are living with a previously diagnosed cancer, so the demand for oncology rehabilitation services is huge and growing,” said Sherin Kamal Fetouh, MD, medical director of oncology rehabilitation physician services at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

“Oncology rehab specialists evaluate and treat disorders associated with cancer, emphasizing the restoration and maintenance of function and quality of life,” said oncology rehabilitation specialist Laine Bowman. He notes the medical center has established an oncology rehabilitation fellowship, one of just three in the nation.

Lymphedema is a common long-term condition among cancer survivors, especially those who have faced breast and head and neck cancers. Surgeons sometimes must remove lymph nodes near the cancer site to determine if the cancer has spread. The damage to the lymphatic system can cause lymphatic fluid to collect just beneath the skin, leading to swelling, infection and other problems.

To help these survivors, The University of Kansas Cancer Center opened the Lymphedema Therapy Clinic in October. Temporarily located at KUCC-Overland Park, the clinic features three lymphedema-certified occupational therapists; one specializes in the care of head and neck cancer patients; two others work with breast cancer patients.

They expect to care for 450 breast cancer patients and 150 head and neck cancer patients in the clinic’s first year. Julie Ginter, director of Rehabilitation Services at The University of Kansas Hospital, said oncology rehabilitation is a multidisciplinary field. In addition to lymphedema therapy, it involves physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language pathology and prosthetics and orthotics.

The hospital plans to open an oncology rehabilitation center at its Indian Creek Campus by late 2015 or early 2016.

“Right now, our focus is on lymphedema patients,” she said. “But our ultimate goal is to provide therapy for all types of conditions brought on by cancer.”

EXPOSURE

Warming our patients

Treatment Clinic staff at The University of Kansas Cancer Center-Westwood have launched “Caps for Cancer.” Their goal: Give each first-time treatment patient a warm, handmade winter cap. Mikala Lodder, RN (front), organized the first monthly hat-making party Dec. 20, where staff sewed and tied the fleece caps. They plan to give 20-30 hats each month.
In the News

A recap of recent articles, TV segments and other media coverage of the region’s leading academic medical center

▶ Ear ailments new focus for science – The New York Times, Jan. 9. A variety of new drugs and research projects across the country are targeting hearing loss. One of them is a clinical trial led by Hinrich Staeker, MD, PhD, professor of otolaryngology at the University of Kansas School of Medicine. The trial is exploring gene therapy aimed at regenerating hair cells.

▶ What does ‘board-certified’ mean? – Yahoo Health, Jan. 8. Several physician groups say new requirements for board certification, especially recertification, are onerous and time-consuming, detracting from patient care. Certification, which is voluntary, is not necessarily a sign of physician skill, said Lee Norman, MD, chief medical officer at The University of Kansas Hospital. “Some people are just lousy test-takers even though they’re excellent physicians,” he said.

▶ New technique for treating frostbite – KSHB 41, Jan. 6. The science of treating frostbite victims has remained largely unchanged for years, but now physicians at The University of Kansas Hospital are using the clot-busting agent called tPA to improve blood flow in those patients. Interventional Radiologist Thomas Fahrbach, MD, explained how tPA helps open tiny blood vessels in affected areas of the body. The hospital has used it three times in the past year, including twice this winter.

▶ Surviving childhood cancer – The Kansas City Star, Jan. 5. The Midwest Cancer Alliance’s Survivorship Transition Clinic, which opened last summer at The University of Kansas Physicians’ Medical Office Building, is helping childhood cancer survivors as they move into adulthood. Young cancer survivors often face a range of chronic health issues. The new clinic is one of just six in the country.

▶ Targeting breast cancer in Missouri – KCTV 5 News, Dec. 31. A new law in Missouri requires physicians to tell women if they have dense breast tissue. Marc Inciardi, MD, who heads Breast Imaging at The University of Kansas Hospital, explained that such women have the option to choose 3D mammograms or ultrasound, which are more effective for detecting breast cancer in dense tissue. He advocated unsuccessfully for a similar law in Kansas and also is helping support it at the federal level.

Serving up hope

Among the many ways The University of Kansas Hospital and The University of Kansas Cancer Center staff helped brighten the holidays in our community: Serving dinner to patients and families at the American Cancer Society’s Hope Lodge in downtown Kansas City. Emergency Medicine’s Jacob Cleek (from left), KUCC-Lee’s Summit Exam’s Joleen Nachbar and Pharmacy’s Leigh Anne Scott dished up salad and lasagna for lodge guests.

Burn center reflects efficient patient care

The University of Kansas Hospital’s Burnett Burn Center (Unit 52) has been reverified for adult and pediatric burn care, the only such center in the Kansas City area.

The certification, from the American Burn Association and endorsed by the American College of Surgeons, includes completing a prereview questionnaire and an in-depth on-site review by members of the association’s verification committee. Our burn center’s on-site visit spanned two days in the fall. Reverification is every three years. The center, which treats about 400 patients a year, was first verified for adult care in 1999 and pediatric care in 2011. It is one of just 44 burn centers in the country accredited for both.

Tracy McDonald, RN, program manager of the hospital’s Trauma/Burn Program, said burn centers increasingly are asked to demonstrate their cost-effectiveness, in addition to quality of care.

For instance, our center has focused on selective use of antibiotics without leading to higher infection rates or skin graft loss.

The center also curbed the number of patients who are admitted into isolation. Now, only those with large burns (covering at least 20 percent of the patient’s body) and those with proven infections must be treated in isolation. The new policy has increased patient and family satisfaction while limiting isolation costs.

Girls’ Night In: More fun, ‘storytelling’

On the heels of last year’s inspiring success, this year’s Girls’ Night In again will feature “A Heartfelt Evening of Storytelling” The 10th annual event, hosted by The University of Kansas Hospital, is slated for Feb. 26 at The Gallery Event Space in Kansas City’s Power & Light District. Five dynamic speakers will share messages from their hearts, mixing humor, advice and experience while raising awareness of women’s heart health.

After the stories, guests will mix and mingle in The Gallery’s elegant venue while enjoying wine, heart-healthy bites and views of the city. This year’s speakers:

- Becky Blades – Artist, entrepreneur, creative consultant and author of “Do Your Laundry or You’ll Die Alone”
- Kelly Corrigan – New York Times bestselling author of “Glitter and Glue”
- Sherry Kuehl – “Snarky in the Suburbs” blogger and author of “Snarky in the Suburbs Trouble in Texas”
- Lynn Rundle – Compassionate heart care champion
- Patricia Sanders-Hall – Heart health advocate and healthcare executive

“Participants will be moved, inspired, entertained and educated by our storytellers speaking from their hearts,” said Janice Benjamin, Development vice president.

You can buy tickets at girlsnightinkc.com. All funds benefit the women’s heart programs of the Adelaide C. Ward Women’s Heart Health Center and Turning Point: The Center for Hope and Healing.
Our People

▶ Officer recognized for valor
– Jacqueline Walden, an officer with the University of Kansas Police Department, has been honored for her act of valor.

A man with a history of emotional and mental disorders last summer tried to jump from a parking garage on the main campus. Walden held the man by his shoulders after he slid from the edge of the garage; she was helped by a medical resident during the 14-minute ordeal until other KU Police and local firefighters arrived.

“It was the most stressful call I’ve been on,” said Walden, who started her law enforcement career in Leavenworth in 2011. She joined KU Police in October 2013.

Walden was one of 96 officers from throughout the metro who were recognized in November by the Metropolitan Chiefs and Sheriffs Association.

The KU Police department operates year-round on the main campus and at other medical center and hospital facilities. Its 32 police officers provide safety and security to patients, staff and guests, and they work with local law enforcement to support community safety.

▶ Excellence in Caring – The University of Kansas Hospital has launched the Excellence in Caring Award, which honors employees each quarter who demonstrate extraordinary levels of care, professionalism and leadership.

The award is open to any employee, not just immediate caregivers, because any employee can make a difference in patient care. It is funded by employees and the family of a grateful heart center patient.

The inaugural winners are Samuel Holmes, patient registration rep in Admitting (heart center), and Chue Yang, healthcare tech in Cardiovascular Progressive Care Unit (HC 5).

Holmes “frequently receives praise from patients and families regarding his caring manner,” according to his nomination. “He not only treats his patients with kindness and respect but also those who work with him.”

Yang “is always kind, always has a great attitude and never complains,” colleagues wrote. “She usually anticipates needs before they come up.”

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