

Pacific Shores Medical Group Leverages Innovation And Efficiency To Enhance Cancer Treatments

■ By **MICHAEL GOUGIS**, Contributing Writer
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As a first grader, Simon Tchekmedyan knew he wanted to be a doctor. Not just any doctor, but a cancer doctor. And somewhere, he has the document to prove it.

“We had to fill out a questionnaire where they asked us what we wanted to be when we became adults,” Tchekmedyan says, “and I wrote in ‘cancer doctor.’ My father kept that, and many years later, he showed it to me. I don’t know why, but I’ve always been fascinated with this disease – and the need to cure it.”

Tchekmedyan has devoted his life to that childhood dream. And today, he oversees a medical practice dedicated to pursuing cures for cancers – one of the largest practices of its kind in the country. He is the founder and medical director of Pacific Shores Medical Group, located on the campus of St. Mary Medical Center in Long Beach. The firm now has five offices across Southern California and employs 120 professionals, with 12 medical oncologists currently on staff and another two set to join in the summer. The practice serves an estimated 5,000 new patients every year.

The group, which provides hematological and ontological services, is affiliated with some of the most prestigious cancer centers in the nation – it is a member of the University of California, Los Angeles, Translational Oncology Research Network. It is affiliated with Long Beach Memorial and St. Mary medical centers, as well as Pacific Hospital, in Long Beach, in addition to the Los Alamitos Medical Center and several others in the region.

Tchekmedyan estimates that he has treated more than 10,000 patients in his 20-year medical career. And he and his fellow physicians are starting their own foundation to ensure that they can give back even more to the community of patients – and the community of researchers dedicated to the treatment and cure of cancer.

Ask Tchekmedyan why his practice has grown, and he focuses on one key area: research. Go to the medical group’s Web page and you will find a series of clinical trials that it is involved in. When it comes to studies and trials of new drugs and new treatments, Tchekmedyan is adamant about pursuing every opportunity to push the frontiers of knowledge and provide his patients with the most up-to-date opportunities for care.

“Clinical research requires a higher standard of care, a higher level of quality at all points of the practice,” Tchekmedyan says. “You have to be perfectly accurate, you are compiling data and information for studies. So we set the bar higher with our involvement in clinical trials, and we extend that level of care to all of our patients.”

The payoff comes when delivering newly developed care practices, medicines and treatments to patients, he says.

“What this means is that throughout our practice, new practices and therapies are intrinsic to what we do. We are intimately familiar with new procedures, new medicines, because we have worked with them for several months before they become widely available,” Tchekmedyan says.

“We cannot only offer our patients treatments that are still in the research and trial phases, but when those treatments are

officially approved, we are already familiar with them.”

Tchekmedyian says the other element that has contributed to the growth of his company has been the insistence on internal support and education. Not only is the staff better informed about the disease and its treatments, but it leads to a greater level of internal cooperation and loyalty to the practice.

“We have a great deal of collegiate support, internal systems of education and continual quality improvements,” he says. “It is a very open, academic environment, but we have a great deal of control over our own destinies. We’re not waiting for someone else to make a decision.

“Every Tuesday, we have a teleconference with all of the physicians. It can take two, three hours. It is a very open, very candid discussion, and all of the physicians have access to the patient information. We can talk about what is best for the patient. We can refer them out to the people we know across the country if that is what’s best for them,” Tchekmedyian says.

And in those teleconferences, Pacific Shores takes advantage of perhaps its most valuable resource – the accumulated knowledge of its physicians and professionals.

“Between our 12 physicians, we have an incredible base of knowledge – it’s not unusual for someone to say, ‘I had a case exactly like that five years ago; here are the case notes.’ And we have an extensive network of experts we know personally across the country,” Tchekmedyian says.

In addition, the size of the operation means more rapid treatments for those in need, he says.

“Because we have all our own laboratory services, we can usually do our lab work within the hour. That means we can start treatments rapidly. Usually, we can do it without sending our patients to the hospital. And with our patients, time is the enemy. If they have to wait, if they have to reschedule, that is time that the disease is progressing,” Tchekmedyian says.

The attention to detail, the emphasis on patient care, infuses the entire staff. Tchekmedyian says that the front office can play a major role in patient care. “If they can get insurance companies to approve treatments rapidly, we can start treatments that much more quickly,” he says. “A lot of credit for our success goes to our physician associates and everyone else on the staff. We have incredible talent here. It’s because of them that we’ve come this far. I have enormous optimism for the future.”

And that future, he says, will include a foundation that he and colleague Dr. Kalust Ucar are starting this year. The Pacific Shores Hematology/Oncology Foundation is designed to assist programs that help cancer patients as well as further research into treatments for the disease.

“We will be supporting programs that improve the quality of life for patients and family,” he says. “We are hopeful that, through our foundation, we will be able to add one more level of attention and caring for our patients.” ■

Captions

Dr. Simon Tchekmedyian is the founder and medical director of Pacific Shores Medical Group, which is located on the campus of St. Mary Medical Center in Long Beach. The practice currently has five offices across Southern California and employs 120 professionals. At right, Dr. Tchekmedyian examines scans of a patient seeking treatment for a brain tumor. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Thomas McConville)

Simon Tchekmedyian, M.D., the founder and medical director of Long Beach-based Pacific Shores Medical Group, talks with Patricia McIntyre, a patient receiving chemotherapy treatment. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Thomas McConville)

Pacific Shores Medical Group’s ability to do most of its lab work internally enables it to begin patient treatments rapidly. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Thomas McConville)