



*Dr. David Brachman (left) and director of research Terry Thomas, perpetually review new research protocols on behalf of their patients.*

treatment after the tumor is removed in surgery. The therapy, called a mammosite, implants a tiny dose of radiation during surgery. The standard six-or-seven week outpatient regimen of radiation treatment is whittled to a mere two or three days. This protocol is currently open to a select group of patients.

For men with prostate cancer, AOS currently has five protocols in progress. One involves the use of IMRT, and is testing to see whether the overwhelmingly successful cure rate can continue with fewer side-effects: the typical urinary frequency and diarrhea that patients often suffer with standard radiation therapy. Another trial, for lymphoma, involves the use of a novel therapy, the use of a specific antibody tagged with a dose of radioactive iodine. "This promises to give cancer cells a one-two punch with amazing specificity," Dr. Brachman explains. Such promising treatments are often not available anywhere else in the state—or even in the region.

Patients at AOS are never obligated to have anything to do with a research protocol, he adds, but they may be offered the opportunity to participate. Each and every trial is carefully reviewed for safety and ethics by boards outside and unaffiliated with AOS. Certain expenses for patients, such as travel or overnight stays in a hotel, are often covered by the research protocol. "Many patients tell us they feel good knowing that they've contributed to improving cancer care," Dr. Brachman says. "We feel good giving our patients the advantage of learning about new therapies—which very well may turn out to be the standard treatment a few months or a few years down the line."

For more information about Arizona Oncology Services or about cancer research protocols, please contact the Foundation for Cancer Research and Education:

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## Patients Who Push Medicine Forward

When President Richard M. Nixon signed the National Cancer Act into law, it was a national nod to speed the pace of research. But a quarter century after his declaration of the "war on cancer," the battle rages on. Physicians continue to search for the most effective, least harmful cancer therapies. "The hard truth in my field," states radiation oncologist **David G. Brachman, M.D.**, "is that even though cancer treatments have been steadily improving for years, they're far from perfect."

In order to raise the standard of cancer care, scientists have long relied on clinical research—studies that involve actual patients. The "protocols," as they're called, depend on cancer patients to sign on, agreeing to be part of the research as they receive care. In the past, notes Dr. Brachman, patients who sought new treatments were those who were desperate. "That's not the case anymore," he says. "What we're seeing today are people with very treatable can-

cer who are interested in knowing the latest and most up-to-date methods of treatment. On top of that, we're seeing patients who are eager to help expand the base of knowledge for patients who come after them."

The patients he speaks of are among those who have sought care at Arizona Oncology Services, a private practice established in 1975, with nine offices and a roster of 18 board-certified physicians who have affiliations at top Arizona hospitals. What distinguishes AOS, which focuses primarily on radiation treatment, is that it has become a leading site for clinical research sponsored and reviewed by the National Cancer Institute. In fact, since establishing its own Foundation for Cancer Research and Education in 1989, which oversees each protocol, AOS has brought more than 25 innovative clinical trials to the Phoenix area. "We're up-to-date with the most current thinking in cancer care," Dr. Brachman says.

Without a doubt, it's the group's

expertise in a number of highly sophisticated radiation techniques that has made it a prime spot for introducing approaches to cancer care. AOS, notes Dr. Brachman, is one of eight accredited centers in the country offering IMRT, or intensity modulated radiation therapy. Used for prostate cancer, primary brain tumors and head-and-neck cancer, this revolutionary adaptation in cancer treatment fine-tunes radiation therapy so that normal cells—only millimeters away from the tumor—remain unscathed. AOS physicians are also trained in the use of the Gamma Knife, the exceptionally rare radiological surgery tool that has helped highly-trained physicians remove some of the most hard-to-reach tumors. Today, the group is able to offer several research protocols testing the most effective use of these developments.

The protocols extend to a wide range of cancers. One trial currently underway, tests a treatment for early stage breast cancer that enables women to avoid a mastectomy and shortens the radiation

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