

PARTNERS

Newsletter of the Patient and Family Advisory Program at Moffitt Cancer Center | FALL 2026

CELEBRATING MOFFITT'S 40th ANNIVERSARY

The Gift of Time: Moffitt's 40 Year Promise to Patients

*Valentina Ahumada, Internal Communications
Coordinator, Strategic Communications*

Forty years ago, Florida's cancer patients often had to leave home to access specialized cancer care. Mark Pizzo remembers those days well.

When his mother was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, Moffitt Cancer Center was still a construction site. Seeking expert care meant traveling hundreds of miles to Texas. Today, world-class cancer care is available just across town.

That transformation is one of the many reasons Moffitt's 40th anniversary is worth celebrating. But for patients and families, Moffitt's story has never been only about buildings, rankings or expansion. It is about time.

"To cancer survivors and their families, access to cutting-edge health care is not a lofty goal," said Pizzo, a longtime Moffitt volunteer and member of the



Opening day at Moffitt's Magnolia campus (October 27, 1986)

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CO-CHAIR COLUMN

*David Dauman, Patient Advisor
and Co-Chair,*



Some Things Never Change...Thankfully

Moffitt Cancer Center is celebrating 40 years. I have experienced 14 of those years as a patient, caregiver and volunteer with Moffitt's Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC).

Over that time, I have watched many things change. New buildings have risen across campus. Clinics have expanded. New technologies, systems and methods of care continue to evolve. There are now more ways than ever for patients to access specialized treatment and support. Many of today's therapies and breakthroughs seem as though they are arriving from the future.

We have all benefited from how much oncology has advanced over the years. I also marvel at how Moffitt maintains such a high level of service and compassion as demand for its care continues to grow at a staggering rate.

And it makes me wonder: Will the Moffitt secret stay intact?

I believe Moffitt saved my life with equal parts oncology, humanity and hospitality. The hearts, hands and smiles were as important as the techniques and technologies. And that was 2014 – in cancer terms, light years ago.



An early design of what would become Moffitt's Magnolia Campus

It was the physician who took extra time to explain. The nurse who brought calm into an anxious moment. The reassuring hand on a shoulder. The eye contact and smiles from people wearing a Moffitt badge. The volunteer who understood. The feeling that even in frightening moments, I was never facing cancer alone.

As health care continues to evolve with greater automation, artificial intelligence and new technologies, I understand why some patients and families may worry that something personal could be lost along the way.

But from the work our PFAC team sees across meetings and subcommittees, I truly believe Moffitt's leadership understands this clearly: technology should support people, never replace them. Moffitt is building the future without losing the formula that made it special from the beginning.

The buildings may grow. The tools may change. The science will continue to advance. But I believe forty years from now, Moffitt will still be what it was on the day it opened: people caring for people.

The Gift of Time

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Patient and Family Advisory Council. “It’s the chance to experience one more hug, share another conversation, hear a child’s happy squeal, witness a daughter’s wedding kiss, see a grandchild’s graduation and marvel at just how blue the sky can be.”

Pizzo’s relationship with Moffitt began in 2002 when he joined the Board of Advisors as a volunteer. At the time, he understood cancer primarily through the loss of his mother. Over the next two decades, cancer would touch nearly every branch of his family tree, including his father-in-law, wife, father and Pizzo himself.

“We’ve gone through the cancer alphabet,” he said. “B-cell and T-cell lymphomas, bladder and CMML, breast and prostate.”

Through each diagnosis, treatment plan and recovery, Moffitt remained a constant.

Cristina Perez, senior director of Patient Experience, has witnessed that same evolution from inside the organization. This year marks 29 years for Perez, who says she “grew up at Moffitt,” even celebrating her 21st birthday in the Infusion Center.



When she first joined, Moffitt had about 400 team members, one main campus and clinics across the street. There was no formal Patient Experience department yet, but the compassion was already there.

“It truly felt like a family,” Perez said. “People showed up every day with kindness and respect, united by a shared commitment to care.”

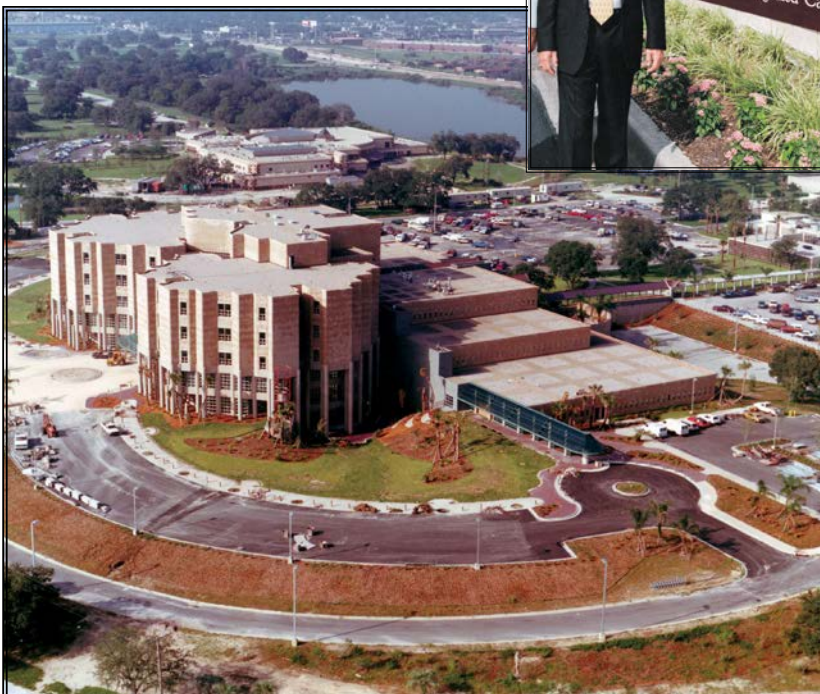
That commitment became more intentional over time. In 2005, Pizzo became one of the founding members of Moffitt’s Patient and Family Advisory Council, which continues to bring patient and caregiver voices into decisions that shape care. This year, PFAC celebrates its 20th anniversary.

For Perez, that partnership reflects what has remained consistent through Moffitt’s growth to more than 10,600 team members: a culture of compassion.

“As Moffitt celebrates 40 years, I hope patients and families remember how they were made to feel, that they were cared for, heard and never alone,” Perez said.

For Pizzo, the impact is equally personal.

“Moffitt has changed many lives for the better, including mine,” he said. “And for that, I am forever grateful.”



It Takes a Family

Rae Sawyer, Family Advisor and Co-Chair, Patient and Family Advisory Council

Everyone in a family is affected when a member is diagnosed with cancer. We were all busy with careers and everyday life when my son, Greg, found a lump under his left arm. Surgical biopsy showed malignant melanoma, and subsequent studies revealed a dreaded Stage IV diagnosis.

Being a Diagnostic Radiologist, I worked with cancer patients every day, performing biopsies for diagnosis and following the progress of treatments. However, it did not prepare me for the devastation I experienced as a mother or my determination to help find the best possible treatment for Greg.

Although the diagnosis was devastating, our family quickly united to be with Greg through his cancer journey. His wife, Carol, became his primary caregiver. She managed his everyday medical needs, provided emotional comfort and organized logistics. I assumed the role of his patient advocate and helped him understand all the information we were receiving and make decisions about the pathway he wished to pursue. The three of us became a tight “unit” that went to every appointment, imaging study, and procedure Greg underwent. My husband, “Poppy” to our grandsons, who were 8 and 12 years old at the time, helped care for the boys. We leaned heavily on each other for support. Some days were overwhelming, but we picked each other up, and carried the burden together.



Rae (Left) and her son, Greg (Right).

We were fortunate to have a close group who could assist as secondary caregivers during the treatment process, including friends and neighbors. By providing additional emotional support, as well as practical assistance, we were able to help Greg negotiate the many everyday challenges that occurred.

Greg came to Moffitt 13 years ago to participate in a clinical trial using emerging immune therapy. He has remained disease-free since that time, which is something we celebrate every day.

Visit [Moffitt.org/Caregivers-Families](https://www.moffitt.org/Caregivers-Families) to learn more about resources available for caregivers, including support groups and the In It Together podcast.



Virtual Relaxation & Meditation

Every Wednesday from 12:15 p.m. – 1 p.m.

Meditation can help:

- Reduce stress
- Manage symptoms such as pain and fatigue
- Improve mood and sleep

Class is free; all are welcome.

To register, visit **[Moffitt.org/Meditation](https://www.moffitt.org/Meditation)** or call **813-745-6052**.

MOFFITT RESOURCES

to Help Patients and Caregivers

UPCOMING EVENTS

September-November

Virtual Relaxation/Meditation for Stress Relief **813-745-6052**

Virtual/Zoom, RSVP only
Wednesday at 11 a.m.

[Moffitt.org/Meditation](https://moffitt.org/Meditation)

Virtual Gentle Restorative Yoga Class **813-745-6052**

Virtual/Zoom, RSVP only
Tuesday at 11 a.m. and Thursday at 2 p.m.

[Moffitt.org/Yoga](https://moffitt.org/Yoga)

Magnolia Open Art Studio

In person, Moffitt's Magnolia campus
3rd floor – Arts in Medicine Studio,
Located next to the B elevator
Monday – Friday, 9:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

McKinley Open Art Studio

In person, Moffitt's McKinley Outpatient Center
2nd floor – Patient and Family Center
Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Virtual Patient and Family Orientation **813-745-1690**

Virtual, RSVP only
Monday – Friday, 2 p.m.

PatientLibrary@Moffitt.org

Patient and Family Orientation **813-745-1690**

In person, RSVP only
By appointment

PatientLibrary@Moffitt.org

Virtual Meet the Experts **813-745-1690**

Virtual/Zoom, RSVP only
Tuesday and Wednesday, 10 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

PatientLibrary@Moffitt.org

PATIENT AND FAMILY VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS

For your convenience, we offer support groups via Zoom.

To learn more about support groups or to register, visit
[Moffitt.org/SupportGroups](https://moffitt.org/SupportGroups) or call the Social Work
Office at **813-745-8407**.

General Cancer Support Group

A group for patients diagnosed with any cancer type.
Meets every Tuesday, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.

Family and Friends Support Group

A group for families, friends and caregivers of patients.
Meets every Wednesday, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.

Ostomates

A group for patients with a colostomy, ileostomy or
urostomy. Meets the first and third Monday of every
month, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.

Metastatic Breast Cancer Support Group

A group for patients with stage 4 metastatic breast
cancer. Meets the first and third Tuesday of every month,
11 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Breast Cancer Connection

A group for patients diagnosed with breast cancer.
Meets the first Tuesday of every month, 6 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Metastatic Breast Cancer Spiritual Support Group

A group for patients with metastatic breast cancer,
facilitated by a Chaplain. Meets the second Thursday of
the month, 11 a.m. – 12 p.m.

BMT-CI Patient Support Group

A group for patients who have had or have been cleared to
receive a bone marrow transplant (BMT) or CAR-T. Meets the
first and third Wednesday of the every month, 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Learn About Upcoming Moffitt Events

You can find a full list of upcoming events by
visiting **[Moffitt.org/Calendar](https://moffitt.org/Calendar)**.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Accessibility Services at Moffitt

Amanda Rivera, Section 1557 and ADA Coordinator, Language and Communication Access

At Moffitt Cancer Center, we are committed to providing patient-centered care in an environment that is welcoming and accessible to all. We offer a range of reasonable accommodations or modifications to support patients throughout their care journey. View our Patient Accessibility Services information in detail by visiting our Moffitt.org page.

Request a Reasonable Accommodation/ Modification at no cost by:

- Emailing: AccessCoordination@Moffitt.org
- Submitting an **Accommodation/Modification Request Form**



Chat Packs

(Kit of Accessibility Tools)

Chat Packs contain hand-held tools designed to support different communication and accessibility needs. Every Moffitt location has a Chat Pack and trained Chat Pack Champions who can bring items directly to patients.

Chat Pack Contents:

CATEGORY	TOOLS & AIDES INCLUDED
 Speech Accessibility	• Speech Communication Boards • LCD Writing Tablet
 Visual Accessibility	• Page Magnifier • Signature Guides • "How to Print Larger" guide • Misc: Pens, Pencils, Erasers
 Auditory Accessibility	• Sound Amplifier (instructions, disposable earphones and microphone covers) • Clear Panel-Window Masks
 Sensory Accessibility	• Noise Cancelling Earmuffs and Disposable Ear Plugs (earmuff disposable covers) • Fidget Cube • Disposable Sunglasses • Weighted Lap Pad

Digital Resources

Our Language & Communication Access iPads include communication board apps with words and pictures. Each app focuses on different topics, so patients can easily find and select the words or phrases they need to communicate with their care team.

Applications:

We use Lingraphica SmallTalk Apps including apps to help communicate with your medical team about medical needs, daily activities and make conversation.

How to Use:

- Select the app that best matches what you want to communicate (for example, medical needs, requests or daily living needs).
- Tap the word or phrase you would like to say.
- The iPad will say your selection out loud.





Specialized Services

Moffitt has partnered with external companies that offer additional accessibility services, including:

- CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) Transcription Services for in-person or virtual visits
- Braille or large-print documents and accessible PDFs
- Audio recordings

These specialized services require advance notice. Delivery timelines may vary depending on the size, complexity, and format requested.

Moffitt’s Patient Accessibility Services provides free support. Please request any accommodations or communication assistance at least three to five business days before your appointment.

- ***Email AccessCoordination@Moffitt.org***
- ***Submit an Accommodation/Modification Request Form at Moffitt.org/AccommodationRequest***



MILES FOR
MOFFITT

Presented by
AutoNation

Move for What Matters

Help fund lifesaving cancer research by participating in the annual Miles for Moffitt. Join virtually or in downtown Tampa on **Nov. 21** to move for what matters – love, courage and finding the cures for cancer.

Visit **MilesforMoffitt.com** to register or donate today!



PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Living with Cancer as a Person, Not a Patient

Karen Maley, Moffitt Patient and Team Member

There is a history of colon cancer in my family. So, in 2019, at age 43, I had my first colonoscopy. A few benign polyps were removed, and I was advised to return in five years for another screening.

Five years later, in October 2024, at age 48, I was diagnosed with rectal cancer and suspicious liver lesions. The diagnosis was scary, and I could not understand how it had grown and spread so quickly in five years! During the 10 years before my diagnosis, I had worked to lower my risk factors by quitting smoking, losing weight, reducing my alcohol intake and adopting a healthier diet.

I decided I could not dwell on how and why it happened. I needed to focus on saving my life. I went into fight mode. I decided that I was not going to be a cancer patient. I was going to be a person living with cancer, and I had a lot of life left to live!

As a Moffitt team member since 2018, I knew Moffitt was the only place to go for the best outcomes. I met Dr. Richard Kim on Nov. 5, 2024, and he confirmed the diagnosis of stage IVA metastatic rectal cancer that had spread to my liver. I started chemotherapy two weeks later, followed by surgery and radiation.

The care plan felt overwhelming. To make it more manageable, I focused on one appointment and one treatment at a time.

Cancer is scary. But I had the best support system. My husband and sister, who flew in from California once a month, took turns driving me to biweekly chemo treatments. My children, family, friends and coworkers checked on me daily and supported me when I needed to rest during treatments and after surgery.

My Moffitt care team of providers and nurses helped manage my chemo and radiation side effects with medication and other interventions. Through it all, I never lost hope. I remained positive



Wings of Hope: Blue Garage Mural.

and believed I would be cured. I continued working, enjoyed weekends with family and friends and even completed my bachelor's degree during treatment!

No cancer journey is linear, and mine was no exception. I stumbled across a few 'humble humps' along the way, which reminded me that even though things seem to be going well, it is still cancer, and there is no rule book. My treatments were delayed due to a pulmonary embolism requiring blood thinners, anemia requiring blood and iron transfusions, and an unrelated intestinal infection requiring hospitalization and IV antibiotics.

Over a year later, on Friday, Feb. 13, 2026, I received the news that all cancer patients hope for. My cancer is gone with no evidence of disease! I had beaten stage IV rectal cancer!

On Nov. 5, 2024, I walked into Moffitt full of hope as a cancer warrior.

On Feb. 13, 2026, I walked out of Moffitt full of life as a cancer survivor!



Karen, Kayaking the Little Manatee River with her husband, Jason.

ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULTS...

The AYA Program: Resources for Adolescents and Young Adults with Cancer

Stephanie Avakian, Adolescent and Young Adult Program Administrator

Being diagnosed with cancer as a young person is an unexpected life-changing event that can differ significantly from being diagnosed later in life. Interrupted schooling, leaving a job, being uninsured or underinsured, fertility and family-planning concerns, dating, and the loss of identity or support systems can create additional challenges for younger patients.

The Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Program at Moffitt was created to address these unique challenges. Serving patients ages 15 to 39 and their families, AYA understands the needs of a younger population finding independence and now becoming dependent on others. Offering age-appropriate resources, fertility funds and psychosocial support through peer connection events and activities, the program meets patients at their level. Additional information on various national resources, including financial assistance, mentors, scholarships and adventure trips is also available.

A dedicated lounge for patients under the age of 40 is located at the Magnolia campus and is available for

AYAs and their guests 24 hours a day. Located on the 4th floor, next to the entrance of 4 North, this relaxing spot is the perfect place to discover more about AYA and national resources, play video games, read, create art, and watch movies. For access, please visit Security or speak with a staff member at the Patient Library or the Red or Gold Information Desks.

In late 2025, Moffitt introduced a new Adolescent and Young Adult consult service. This virtual appointment allows patients 45 and younger to meet with the AYA nurse practitioner to discuss various topics such as fertility preservation, family-building options, sexual health, psychosocial assessment and referrals to Genetics and Survivorship. To schedule an appointment, speak to your Moffitt provider or call the Patient Appointment Center at 813-745-8000.

Visit [Moffitt.org/AYA](https://www.moffitt.org/AYA) or call 813-745-4736 to learn more about Moffitt's Adolescent and Young Adult program.



[AYA lounge pictured here.](#)

Holidays Your Way, Not the "Perfect" Way

Tania Marrero, Outpatient BMT/Heme Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Preparing for an upcoming holiday with a new cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming. You may still be dealing with your diagnosis and feel the pressure to think about holiday plans. There is often a desire to make things “perfect” for our families and friends, by way of gifts or celebrations. These high-stakes feelings are very common and very normal. The biggest thing to remember is that no holiday needs to be “perfect” to be memorable.

Families can help by asking what they can do to help during the season. You can choose to spend quiet time at home or develop new, smaller family traditions. The emotional connection happens in those small, simple moments like sharing stories, having a meal as a family, or going through old family photos. It doesn't need to be grand; the house doesn't need to be spotless. You can dress up or down, doing whatever brings you the most joy. If a big gathering is too much, it is okay to shorten visits and events when needed. Having open conversations with your loved ones about your needs and desires can help you feel more connected with them and reduce stress around the holidays.

When you feel the pressure of making your holidays “perfect,” do your best to gently bring your attention back to now. Take pictures, record videos, write down that funny joke you just heard. These small

actions can create a sense of comfort and connection during times of sadness and unease. The goal is not perfection, but creating meaning, memories and love in a way that feels right for you.

For additional support, contact Moffitt's Social Work Office at 813-745-8407.



Celebrate Compassionate Care



The Patti K. Halula Legacy Award honors Moffitt team members who go above and beyond to support patients and families through empathy, collaboration, and patient-centered care. Inspired by patient advisor, Patti Halula's legacy, this award recognizes those making a meaningful difference in the patient experience every day.

***Know someone who embodies these values?
Visit [Moffitt.org/PKHLegacyAward](https://moffitt.org/PKHLegacyAward) to
submit a nomination.***





MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME AT MOFFITT...

While You Wait at Moffitt

Amanda Pearson, Patient and Family Specialist

You may find yourself with time between appointments at Moffitt. Whether you're a patient or supporting someone you love, waiting can feel long and sometimes overwhelming. In those moments, even a small pause, a breath of fresh air, a warm drink or a quiet space can make a difference.

If you're looking for a quick break, you can grab a bite or a cup of coffee at one of our cafés or cafeterias, where you'll be greeted by a friendly face and plenty of options. There are also places to sit and enjoy your meal, including outdoor seating. At some locations, you may even find a healing garden, a peaceful spot to step away for a moment.

If you'd like something more hands-on, our Open Art Studios offer creative activities led by our Artists in Residence. These spaces are designed to help you relax, express yourself and take your mind off the day. You might even catch live music during your visit.

For those who enjoy reading, or simply want a quiet place to sit, our Patient Libraries are a great resource. You can explore materials, learn about upcoming events

or recharge with a cup of tea. Computers, free printing and faxing are also available for personal use. Patient and Family Specialists are there to connect, answer questions or simply spend a few moments with you.

Quiet spaces, including non-denominational chapels, are available if you'd like a place to pray, meditate, rest, take a few deep breaths or gather your thoughts. Gift shops are available at select locations if you're looking for a small pick-me-up or something for a loved one.

We know that being at Moffitt can feel overwhelming, and there may be a lot on your mind. You don't have to fill every moment, and sometimes stepping away for a little while is enough.

Don't hesitate to ask a team member about spaces and activities available at your location. Visit Moffitt.org/Patient-Family/While-at-Moffitt for a complete list of convenient amenities and resources.



Have Questions About Your Wait?

If you experience a delay during your appointment, please let us know. Our team is here to provide updates, answer questions and help you feel supported throughout your visit.



Patient and Family Orientation

LEARN HOW TO:



**Connect with
Programs & Services**



**Partner with
Your Care Team**



**Find Your Way
Around Moffitt**

- Virtual sessions presented at 2 p.m. on weekdays
- In-person sessions available by appointment
- Each session offers a 30-minute presentation with Q&A
- Presented in English and Spanish
- View online at **MOFFITT.org/Orientation**

813-745-1690 | Orientation@Moffitt.org

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*If you would like to be involved in making Moffitt the best it can be for all patients and families, contact the Patient and Family Advisory Program at **PatientAdvisors@Moffitt.org** or **813-745-3753**.*

