**TEAM: HORNELL CANCER CENTER - RADIATION ONCOLOGY**

I would like to introduce myself, and my team, as a team who truly identifies the meaning of **teamwork**. My name is LeSandra “Sandy” Bertch and I am a full time Certified Radiation Oncology Nurse for the Cancer Center in Hornell, NY. This center was recently taken over by the U of R in January 2015. We have been in Hornell for 23 years in which I have worked here for the entire time. It has been owned by many different physicians and companies over the years, which can certainly be a challenge in itself, but our biggest challenge came in 3/2013 when the owner of our facility passed away unexpectantly, followed by the passing of our full time physician of 3 years from pancreatic cancer in 9/2013. As a team, we had to pull together to help prevent our patients from feeling concern over their care. At this time, we were a staff of 4 employee’s, now being forced to work with locum physicians which could be a different physician from one week to the next. It sometimes required retraining each new physician with the use of our computer, treatment planning systems, and dictation device , all while trying not to let patients feel the changes. This sounds easier than it was, since we did not know for sure what our own futures would hold but patient care was our priority. I need to mention, we were very lucky to have a locum physician, Dr. Ralf Kiehl, who tried to work for us as much as possible over the last 2 years to help with continuity of care. His impact on the Hornell Cancer Center will never be forgotten.

For 23 years, I have been the person who took on various hats, as we had staffing changes, etc. Being a small facility we often, as a team, needed to work outside our known position. I am the nurse but over the years, I have taken on the management role also. I have learned to work with the local hospital dietician for patient nutritional needs and familiarize myself with the various other outpatient services in the area and work closely with them in order to help patients in all areas of their care. I have to reach out to home health services, outpatient physical therapy, meals on wheels, local cancer services programs, bus and taxi services, and other patient physicians, to coordinate all aspects of our patients care. They may be receiving radiation treatments at our office but this is 1 small part of each patients care. It takes everyone to keep the patient healthy and strong and hopefully out of the hospital. Treatment of patients with head and neck cancer are the most challenging in regards to nutrition and hydration. Keeping them out of the hospital while undergoing chemoradiation is truly a great task. It could never be done without all these various other support services. And lets not forget family. My job is always reduced when a patient has a wonderful family support.

 As staffing changes occurred, I took on anything necessary to keep the facility running smoothly with no impact on patient care. I worked as secretary, along with my other duties, for 6 months. Being such a rural area with a small local hospital, we don’t have all services readily available at our fingertips. You might be surprised, but it wouldn’t be unusual to see me changing a lightbulb or cleaning a toilet. I won’t let my husband know all my maintenance talents I have learned while working here.

That being said, I could never have been able to do all those things if I didn’t have a team who worked along by my side, picking up wherever I needed help. I have 2 radiation therapists, Tammy Williams, who has worked here 17 years, and Kim Roberts, who has worked here 5 years. They would readily put patients in an exam room, if I were busy, and even sit at the front desk, to answer phones when necessary. They have filed numerous patient reports in charts and even cleaned at times.

My secretary had worked here for many years and was trained to take blood pressure’s, put patient’s in exam rooms, and even cut blocks, at one time. Unfortunately for us, she felt the need to move on to expand her career and left in 9/2014, hence why I was also the secretary for 6 months. I now have a new secretary who helps me immensely with billing and coding. When necessary, she will weigh a patient and put them in exam rooms also. Her name is Serene Libordi.

We were able to overcome all of this, just by working together as a team. We were all happy to help each other out and to learn something more in order to keep the business running smoothly with minimal or no effect on patient care. We have all had to be flexible and adjust to our ever changing environment.

I measure our success first in the way my patients and/or family members speak about our care and how we have made them feel. The patient is what it is all about. Following patients progress and seeing/hearing of their successes, and that our team may have been a small part of those successes, say it all.

Second, after 2 years of having many physicians covering here at the clinic, we have been praised many times, of our efficiency, and hard work. Dr. Yuhchyau Chen, U of R Radiation Oncology, came to work with us last 8/2014 for a short time, and was very impressed with how well we worked as a team. She felt we gave excellent care to our patients and always went over and beyond to give our patients the absolute best care. She was so impressed with how quickly we were able to meet her needs and the patients needs with minimal staffing. That being said, she had a huge part in our facility becoming a part of the U of R.

Our office could never had made it thru the years without working together as a team. We have all expanded our job duties to make sure that patient care is never compromised. We all have knowledge that we bring to the table in our own perspective fields of expertise but in stepping outside our comfort zone and learning other things we have made ourselves even more useful to each other and our patients. If there is something I don’t know or can’t handle, I know one of my team members may be able to help me with it, and if not we will learn together.