

Healing begins with hope

Board-certified in Interventional Radiology and an academic Assistant Professor of Radiology at Northwestern University, Dr. Francis Facchini is a leading practitioner of advanced interventional radiology in the greater Chicago area. His expertise is so renowned, that he was invited to join the team of interventional radiologists treating Beta, Chicago's Brookfield Zoo's female lowland gorilla, using uterine fibroid embolization. The procedure is credited with saving Beta's life.



"Medicine for me is less a job than it is a vocation," says Dr. Facchini, known as "Frank" to family, friends, and colleagues. "I believe it's a privilege to be able to help extremely sick people. It's a very personal thing for me." As part of a six-man clinical practice serving five Chicago-area hospitals, the majority of Dr. Facchini's patients have a cancer diagnosis of some sort.

"We really don't practice anything but interventional radiology, which allows us to sub-specialize within the field," he notes. "I tend to lean towards cancer care; it's the heart of my practice."

His interest in helping people definitively influenced his decision to become a physician, as illustrated by his treatment philosophy.

"Medicine for me is about the provision of hope. When a patient has hope, they have a little more peace. At this level of disease expression and treatment, it's important that the patient knows that they and we are doing all we can for them."

With cancer care as his main area of specialty, most of Dr. Facchini's time is spent in interventional oncology, and in particular, exploring new technologies that have a meaningful impact on his patients.

"There's been incredible push on behalf of technology to find a place where interventional radiology can have a positive impact, and there's an enormous amount of technology supporting this effort. There are so many tools now available that we're really able to make a profound difference in our patients' lives."

Dr. Facchini uses the complete array of treatments available to his patients; however, it is these newest technologies he believes hold the greatest promise. One area of focus is in the expanding modality of micro-therapies like TheraSphere, a minimally invasive Yttrium-90 micro-brachytherapy for liver cancer patients that deploys microspheres directly to the tumor bed via the hepatic artery. By leveraging these cutting-edge technologies, he can provide a higher level of patient-focused care.

"I truly value therapies like TheraSphere; they give me the opportunity to tailor treatment to the patient's needs. It's similar to buying a fine suit – anyone can buy an off-the-rack suit and generally, it'll fit. With a fine suit, you expect it to be tailored to fit you exactly," explains Dr. Facchini. "Patients want individualized healthcare, not healthcare for the system. These newer treatments have a real science behind them, allowing me to customize care for each individual."

On a day-to-day basis, his patients are realizing the benefits of these new technologies.

"Thanks to treatment options like TheraSphere which we use regularly, we have many wonderful patient survival stories. For example, we treated a farmer from central Illinois. He was a 6'2" giant of a man with hands the size of catcher's mitts. He suffered from hepatocellular carcinoma and was given just weeks to live, but he's still alive months later with significant tumor mass reduction. Or the 98-year old woman we treated who lived to celebrate her 100th birthday. Advanced technologies like TheraSphere are giving our patients hope, which I believe is essential to their well-being, and I think our patients would agree."

Having seen their positive results first-hand, Dr. Facchini has introduced micro-therapies to other institutions. Since 2006, he has launched two of the three active TheraSphere programs in Illinois – one in central Illinois, one in Chicago. And his belief in the healing power of technology doesn't stop there. Asked about trends in cancer treatments and research, he quickly highlights technology's expanding role in medicine.

"I believe we'll see more precisely directed therapies – therapies targeted to specific sites with little systemic effect, lowered toxicities, and improved outcomes. I think we'll see more work with nanoparticles. Ten or twenty years from now, we'll have many more therapies tailored to individual pathologies."

When not working, Dr. Facchini, his wife, and two children can often be found pursuing their love of skiing both on the slopes or the lake; he often also indulges his passion for woodworking.

"I guess I love working with both my hands and my mind," he laughs.