

# AWARE! | HL

Prevention and awareness information from The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center



John Zhang, MD



Iyare Esemuede, MD

## Get Screened!

### New Guidelines for Colorectal Cancer Screenings

Local surgeons Dr. John Zhang and Dr. Iyare Esemuede returned to the Leever Cancer Center in March — Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month — to talk about what's new in colon and rectal cancer care during two free community education programs. The message: Because colorectal cancer is on the rise among young and middle-aged adults in the United States, the American Cancer Society (ACS) wants most people to get screened sooner.

“It is so important that we come here every year to talk about colorectal cancer,” says Waterbury Hospital’s Dr. John Zhang. “Epidemiological research is constantly developing new information that changes the way we look at and treat diseases. This report on colorectal cancer that came out last year is a good example.”

The report Dr. Zhang refers to details a study led by American Cancer Society researchers, who studied incidence rates by five-year age groups and by year of birth. They looked at the medical records of nearly half a million people age 20 and older who were diagnosed with colon or rectal cancer between 1974 and 2013. The results were published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, and indicated that, once age is taken into account, those born in 1990 have double the risk of colon cancer — and quadruple the risk of rectal cancer — compared to those born around 1950, when risk was lowest.

“The findings were pretty significant,” said Dr. Iyare Esemuede of The Stanley J. Dudrick Department of Surgery at Saint Mary’s Hospital.

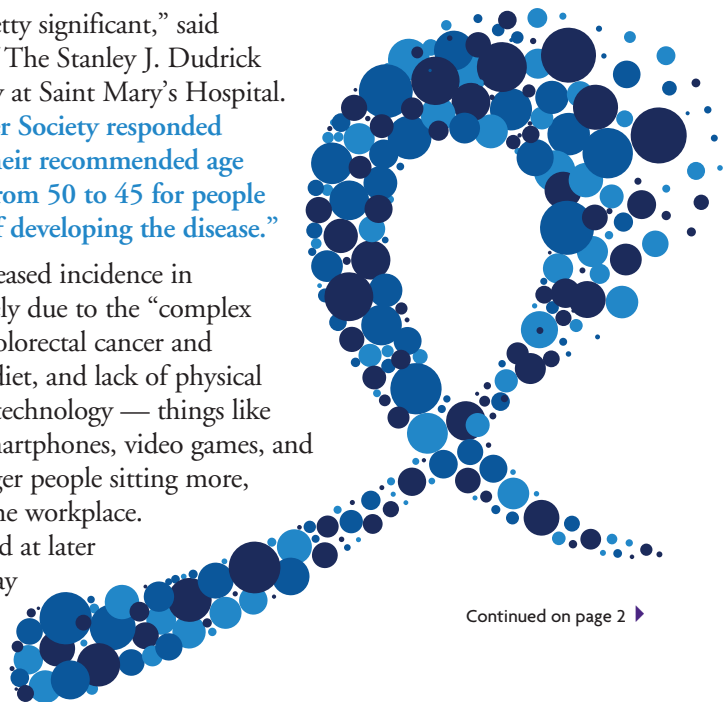
**“The American Cancer Society responded quickly by lowering their recommended age for initial screenings from 50 to 45 for people with an average risk of developing the disease.”**

The ACS says the increased incidence in younger patients is likely due to the “complex relationship between colorectal cancer and obesity, an unhealthy diet, and lack of physical activity.” Advances in technology — things like computers, laptops, smartphones, video games, and HDTV — have younger people sitting more, both at home and in the workplace. That they are diagnosed at later stages of the disease may simply be a function

### Prevention is key.

#### Ways you can lower your colorectal cancer risk:

- Starting screenings at the right time for you, based on your age and family history
- Eating a high-fiber, low-fat diet
- Getting regular exercise
- Watching your weight
- Avoiding tobacco
- Limiting alcohol intake





of age: younger patients often ignore symptoms (see sidebar, right) longer, because colorectal cancer is not on their radar. Recognizing and responding to those symptoms is important, says Dr. Esemuede, but prevention is key.

“Colon cancer is very common in the United States,” notes Dr. Esemuede. “It is also preventable, much of it through dietary measures. The biggest impact may come from eating a high-fiber diet consisting of a lot of fruits and vegetables. Fiber increases the transit time of carcinogens through the colon, while producing short-chain fatty acids, which are the main nutritional source for colonic cells. Limiting your intake of things like red meats, fats and processed foods while avoiding excessive alcohol consumption can also help prevent colon cancer.”

And, says Dr. Zhang, those all-important screenings are not just

about early detection, they can also be an important form of prevention.

“The only cancer that is currently considered preventable is colon cancer,” says Dr. Zhang. “We know that almost all colon cancers develop from a polyp. Polyps are benign. All of the research we have tells us that it takes between five and 10 years for a benign polyp to become a cancerous tumor; it is an accumulation of multiple genetic processes and multiple steps. We not only find those pre-cancerous polyps during colonoscopy screenings, we remove them at the same time, stopping the disease before it starts.”

And while there are a number of new screening methods, including stool DNA tests and virtual colonography, only colonoscopy allows physicians to both detect and remove polyps.

“The gold standard is still colonoscopy,” says Dr. Zhang. “We don’t

## Be aware.

### Common Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer

- A change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool, that lasts for more than a few days
- A feeling that your bowel doesn’t empty completely
- Persistent abdominal cramping or pain
- Rectal bleeding
- Dark stools, or blood in the stool
- Weakness and fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss

recommend anything else.”

Talk to your healthcare provider to determine when — and how often — you should be screened for colorectal cancer based on your personal and family medical history.

Learn more about colorectal cancer screening by calling the American Cancer Society at 800-227-2345 or visiting [cancer.org/coloncancer](http://cancer.org/coloncancer). A screening guidelines card is available on our website: [leevercancercenter/screeningcard](http://leevercancercenter/screeningcard).

## REMEMBERING DR. NANCY CAPPELLO



### *Activist, Warrior, Trailblazer*

It is with deep sadness, tremendous respect, and immeasurable gratitude that we pause to honor the life and work of **Dr. Nancy M. Cappello**, who changed the way we look at breast cancer. Dr. Cappello was a special education teacher and administrator in 2004 when a physical exam and subsequent ultrasound led to a diagnosis of advanced breast cancer, a condition that was not seen on two separate mammograms because, her doctors explained, the tumor was obscured by her dense breast tissue. Nancy made it her mission to educate patients, physicians, insurers, and legislators about both the limitations of mammograms, and the number of women — nearly 40 percent of those seeking mammograms — whose dense breast tissue may compromise the effectiveness of the test. Nancy worked with state legislators and medical experts to effect change; in 2009 Connecticut became the first state to require doctors to tell women if they have dense breasts and to require insurance companies cover ultrasound

scans for those who do. The response across the nation was overwhelming: Nancy left teaching and founded Are You Dense? — a nonprofit education and advocacy group dedicated to impacting legislation beyond Connecticut’s borders. Nancy testified before state legislatures (more than 35 have enacted policy changes) and addressed medical conferences in the United States, Japan, France, Italy, and Canada. Nancy died in 2018 from complications of her 2004 cancer treatment, leaving an indelible mark on the medical community and a legacy of lives both changed and saved across the globe. Her husband, Joe, is continuing her work.

## Spotlight on Cancer Registrars:

# Amy Baldwin-Stephens and Sara Mercado

They say that knowledge is power — it equips us to predict, understand, prevent, and solve problems. Sourcing healthcare knowledge is critically important, especially when it comes to cancer, where it must be broad in scope, precise in detail, and backed by meticulous data. In Waterbury, that data is managed by highly trained cancer registrars working at the city’s two hospitals: Amy Baldwin-Stephens at Saint Mary’s Hospital and Sara Mercado at Waterbury Hospital.

Cancer registries are vast databases of detailed information about individual cancer cases. Cancer registrars, like Sara and Amy, create and manage those databases by collecting, recording, tracking, analyzing, and reporting data for every cancer patient seen at their respective hospitals. Registry data includes patient demographics, cancer characteristics, treatment information, and patient outcomes. It is gleaned from a variety of sources, including pathology reports and hospital discharge data.

“Once a case is identified as being reportable, we create an ‘abstract’ summarizing the patient’s diagnosis and care,” explains Sara. “I always think of it as telling the patient’s cancer story: How/when/where were they diagnosed? What kind of cancer is it, and where is it? How severe/advanced is it? Where/how were they treated? Did the cancer go away? Did it come back five years later? As the world has begun to better understand cancer’s behavior, the level of information we collect has increased exponentially.”

Amy and Sara share those patient stories with healthcare agencies locally, across the state, and across the nation.

“The data we collect is reported to the State of Connecticut Central Tumor Registry and to the National Cancer Database, which is overseen by the American College of Surgeons’ Commission on Cancer,” Amy explains. “The Connecticut Central Tumor Registry reports data nationally to the National Cancer Institute’s Surveillance Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) program. We also participate in a stringent accreditation process through the American College of Surgeons’

Commission on Cancer. Accredited programs must have a cancer committee to oversee cancer program activities, and the cancer registrar is an integral part of the cancer committee, providing data for decision-making purposes and to ensure quality data are collected for each patient.”

It is that breadth of accountability that Sara, who has worked in the field for four years, finds so rewarding.

“On any given day, I might be summarizing a patient’s diagnosis and treatment to report to the State of Connecticut, organizing a Cancer Committee meeting, attending an educational seminar on the newest advancements in cancer technologies, or researching the latest changes in cancer staging,” Sara says, “and that’s just a small handful of the responsibilities of the job.”

Both Amy and Sara hold Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) and Certified Tumor Registrar (CTR) credentials, which ensure that they are technologically prepared to effectively manage medical databases and understand cancer terminology and treatment protocols. Their preparation required them to study everything from anatomy, physiology and database management, to medical

coding and healthcare history and law. The work they do is challenging; the potential impact is almost immeasurable.

“In a behind-the-scenes way, cancer registries have been helping prevent and treat cancer for decades,” explains Sara. “Whenever a person reads about a cancer statistic in the United States, the data behind that statistic came from a cancer registrar. Physicians need data for decision making, researchers need data to determine cancer trends, hospitals need data to assess the needs of the communities they service, and the companies developing new cancer treatments need data to find out what works and what doesn’t. Advancements in cancer care simply cannot be made without the data that cancer registrars provide.”

**“As the world has begun to better understand cancer’s behavior, the level of information we collect has increased exponentially.”**

— Amy Baldwin-Stephens



**“In a behind-the-scenes way, cancer registries have been helping prevent and treat cancer for decades.”**

— Sara Mercado

# Happy Retirement, Dr. Joseph Bowen!

*"One of a Kind"*

Family, friends, and colleagues gathered in March to honor Dr. Joseph Bowen on the occasion of his retirement, after a remarkable career that spanned more than four decades. Saint Mary's Hospital President Dr. Steve Schneider, Practice Manager Steve Anderson, and brother Daniel Bowen were among those paying tribute to Dr. Bowen during the celebration, recalling his extraordinary work ethic, sincere dedication to patients, and skill as a practitioner.



- 1: Dr. Bowen pictured with (Left to right) daughter, Katie; wife, Ellen; and brother, Daniel (far right).
- 2: Dr. Steven Schneider, President of Saint Mary's Hospital, greets Dr. Bowen during the celebration.
- 3: Presentation to Dr. Bowen by Steve Anderson.
- 4: Dr. Kert Sabbath (left) and Dr. Anamika Katoch (right) joined in honoring Dr. Bowen.
- 5: Dr. Bowen surrounded by past and current staff members.

"What we heard over and over was that Dr. Bowen was one of a kind," says Leever Cancer Center Executive Director Kevin Kniery. "His knowledge and ability are extraordinary, but beyond that, he was profoundly dedicated to being available to his patients and his colleagues. He went above and beyond to return calls and to assist fellow physicians. We're incredibly grateful for all he did for Leever and for the community."

# An Ounce of Prevention: Screenings Matter; Ours Are Free

Routine screenings can help prevent some cancers by identifying precancerous conditions. They can also limit the complications of the disease and its treatment through early detection. The Leever Cancer Center regularly partners with area physicians to offer free cancer screenings to the community. In May, physicians from Yale Dermatology spent an afternoon offering free skin cancer screenings at Leever. Event results:

**92** people screened | **11** had lesions that were recommended for non-urgent follow up appointments with a dermatologist

**27** had lesions that were recommended for a biopsy with a dermatologist | **54** had negative screening exams



Thank you to the providers from Yale Dermatology! (Left to right) Brett King, MD, PhD; Amanda Zubek, MD, PhD; Shadajsa Perry, LPN; Elizabeth Ramos, RMA; Ilya Lim, MD; Alicia Little, MD, PhD; Christopher Bunick, MD, PhD; Stacy Morales, LPN and Sarah Cianciolo, LPN (not in photo).

## Are you a candidate for a FREE low-dose CT screening for lung cancer?

More people are being diagnosed with late stage lung cancer.

- Are you aged 55 to 74 years old?
- Do you currently smoke or have quit smoking in the past 15 years, and have at least a 30 pack-year smoking history (1 pack a day for 30 years or 2 packs a day for 15 years),

You may qualify for a free low-dose CT screening. Call your doctor today to find out.



### SELF-CARE TOOLBOX SERIES:

## Self-Care, Right Here

Patients, caregivers, healthcare staff, and families spent Tuesday afternoons in April learning new ways to effectively unplug and manage stress as part of Leever’s innovative Building Your Self-Care Toolbox series. Each one-hour program was led by a highly trained professional practitioner; all programs were free and open to the public.

“Our ongoing Self-Care Toolbox series has been very well attended and highly successful in teaching new tips, skills, and strategies for managing some of the common stressors patients and their families often face,” says Deborah Parkinson, Director of Operations at the Leever Cancer Center. “We’re pleased to be able to offer these classes at no cost to the community a few times each year.”

...new tips, skills, and strategies for managing some of the common stressors...



The April series included chair yoga, aromatherapy, and hand and foot massage sessions. It kicked off with a look at EFT— also known as Emotional Freedom Technique, or Tapping — which combines ancient Chinese acupressure and modern psychology. The practice consists of tapping your fingertips on specific meridian points, or energy pathways in the body, while focusing on difficult emotions, feelings, or physical sensations. The process helps to calm the nervous system, redirect thinking, and restore the body’s balance of energy.

Stay up to date on all our community programs by visiting our website: [leevercancercenter.org](http://leevercancercenter.org) or by following us on Facebook.

# Fighting Fatigue with Food

By Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO



Wiped out. Pooped. Exhausted. Zero energy. I cannot move without some caffeine. Chances are you have experienced at least one of these feelings. Perhaps you have been burning the candle at both ends, or maybe you haven't been getting enough sleep. A great nap or eight hours of sleep can often resolve the problem, but if it doesn't, maybe you are experiencing fatigue.

According to the Mayo Clinic, fatigue is defined as “unrelenting exhaustion that isn’t resolved by rest. It’s a nearly constant state of weariness that develops over time and reduces your energy, motivation, and concentration, which can then impact your emotional and psychological well-being.”

Fatigue is experienced by many people and is also a common symptom or complaint in cancer patients, particularly those going through radiation, chemotherapy, or a combination of both. Sometimes it can resolve upon completion of treatment, but often it lingers. Eating and lifestyle changes can often help your symptoms.

It’s a wise idea to discuss your fatigue with your doctor or other medical professional to make sure that there are not any underlying issues that require additional evaluation.



## SOME STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO HELP MANAGE FATIGUE:

**Start your day right — don’t forget about breakfast!** Easy to skip, breakfast provides the fuel you need to jumpstart your day. Eating breakfast can improve energy, concentration, and alertness throughout the day, and can actually lower risk of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Try to have some combination of:

- ▶ Healthy carbohydrates for quick energy: whole grains, fruits, sweet potatoes, squash, starchy vegetables.
- ▶ Lean protein for endurance and maintenance of body tissue and the immune system: meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, and low-fat dairy products.
- ▶ Healthy fats for energy and satiety including olive and canola oil, avocado, and nuts.
- ▶ Fiber from fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to keep you fuller for longer and help to maintain your GI tract.

### **Eat smaller meals throughout the day instead of three giant meals.**

Your body needs to get fuel/energy throughout the day in order to function. Overeating can make us tired and can lead to obesity, which worsens fatigue. Keep in mind that a combination of healthy carbohydrates, protein, fat, and fiber will provide you with the most staying power. Avoid excessive sweets, fats, and greasy and spicy foods as well as too much caffeine.

**Stay hydrated!** Two thirds of your body is made up of water. Although you can live without food, your body can only survive a few days without water. Fluids help maintain body temperature, move food through the intestines, and help to produce energy. Dehydration is the major cause of low energy, since without adequate hydration the body puts all its energy into maintaining water balance within the body. Try to consume about eight or more cups of any fluid (don’t forget about the water in fruits, soups, and even oatmeal). Hydration needs increase with warm weather, exercise and a high-fiber diet. Limit your alcohol consumption, since it dehydrates the body, acts as a depressant, and can worsen fatigue.

**Keep moving.** Exercise if your health-care team says it’s okay. Exercise helps to maintain muscle or lean body mass, which increases strength and energy. Light to moderate activity can decrease fatigue, including cancer fatigue.

**Lower your stress.** Stress and worry can worsen fatigue. Activities like yoga, meditation, deep breathing, and counseling can help to reduce stress levels and improve fatigue. Reading, painting, listening to music, or other activities that give you pleasure are often a great distraction and help to reduce fatigue.

Taking care of yourself is key to maximizing your energy and minimizing fatigue.

**Questions about nutrition?** Contact our nutritionist, Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO, at 203-575-5510 or email [ksabbath@leevercancercenter.org](mailto:ksabbath@leevercancercenter.org).

# A Community of Caring

The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center wishes to express its appreciation and a sincere thank you to its neighbors and friends by recognizing the spirit and hard work of the members of our community in fulfilling the Mission of the Leever Cancer Center.

## HEARTS OF BLUE

For the fourth consecutive year, the **Watertown Police Department** harnessed the generosity of local businesses, golf fanatics, and gracious donors to pull off a fun day for a great cause. Our deep and sincere thanks to WPD, their volunteers, and their donors for gifting the Leever Cancer Center with \$20,000 in proceeds from their annual golf tournament.

## CARING STUDENTS LEADING THE WAY

Students across the region continue to generously support the Leever Cancer Center with donations raised during a range of school-based activities. Our sincere thanks to the **Pomperaug High School Student Council**, who raised money selling pink shirts; **the Swift Middle School Student Council**, whose “Pink Out” day supports Leever patients; **Hop Brook Elementary School students** for their generous donation to help care for breast cancer patients and their families; **Woodbury Middle School’s fall athletes** who raised money to honor “all warriors fighting the fight”; **Children’s Community School students** who raised money on “Pink Day”; and **students from St. John the Evangelist School**, who each donated two dollars to complement their uniforms with a “touch of pink” to support breast cancer patients.



And it’s not just current students making a difference: our thanks to **Janice Scarino and her fellow Holy Cross High School alumni from the Class of 1959**, who delivered fleece blankets for the comfort of our patients.

(Left) Marge and Estelle, American Cancer Society volunteers, received Chemo Care bags for HLCC patients from the Kindergarten class at Saint Mary Magdalen School.



## DEDICATED WARRIOR

Colorectal cancer survivor **Mike Mancini** (above) invited his colleagues at The Hartford to show their support by filling comfort bags for local cancer patients. They rose to the challenge, providing generously packed bags and flexing their muscles as they join Mike in the fight.



**PINK AID!** A grant in the amount of \$5K was made to Saint Mary’s Hospital Foundation – to provide rides to and from treatment for underserved breast cancer patients undergoing treatment. The ACS office at HLCC coordinates the use of these funds. (Left to right) Robin Sills, RN, Physician Liaison, Trinity Health Of New England; Deborah Parkinson, HLCC; Melissa Seres, HLCC; Melinda Marino, RN, Saint Mary’s Hospital; Ann Marie Moreira (ACS); Lynette Letsky-Piombo, Saint Mary’s Hospital Foundation; Natalie Teixeira, Saint Mary’s Hospital Oncology Center.

## Aware!

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We encourage your feedback.  
If there is a cancer topic you would like covered, to respond to an article you’ve read, or to be put on our mailing list, please call 203-575-5555 or email: [dparkinson@leevecancercenter.org](mailto:dparkinson@leevecancercenter.org)



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# Community Events and Monthly Support Groups

SPRING/SUMMER

## NEW MONTHLY EVENT:

### TAKE 2: BRAVE AT HEART 2

**Second Wednesday of each month, 2:30 PM – 3:30 PM  
in the HLRCC Meditation Room**

Like our long-standing Brave at Heart group, Brave at Heart 2 offers support and community for women and men dealing with breast cancer. Unlike Brave at Heart, Brave at Heart 2 meets during the day, thanks to the generosity of group leader and survivor Anne Pringle. Call Anne for more information, 203-910-7582.

### AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY: REACH TO RECOVERY:

by appointment, contact the ACS at 203-756-8888

**ART THERAPY:** monthly, 2nd and 4th Friday, 2 PM,  
contact Deborah Parkinson: 203-575-5564

**BRAVE AT HEART BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly,  
1st Wednesday, 7 PM – 9 PM, contact Anne Pringle: 203-910-7582

**BRAVE AT HEART 2:** monthly, 2nd Wednesday, 2:30 PM – 3:30 PM,  
contact Anne Pringle: 203-910-7582

**COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS:** monthly, 2nd Wednesday,  
6:45 PM – 10 PM, contact Sharon: 860-384-1398

**CT MULTIPLE MYELOMA FIGHTERS SUPPORT GROUP:**  
at Prospect Library, monthly, 2nd Tuesday, 6 PM – 8 PM,  
contact Robin Tuohy: 203-206-3536

**ENERGY THERAPY:** Tuesdays and Wednesdays,  
contact Melissa Seres, MSW: 203-575-5511

**FAMILY AND FRIENDS SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly, 3rd Monday,  
12 PM – 1 PM, contact Melissa Seres, MSW: 203-575-5511

**FREEDOM FROM SMOKING:** an 8-week smoking cessation series,  
contact Sandra Micalizzi, APRN, CDE, Community Outreach Nurse,  
at 203-575-5573 for information on the start of the next series.

## TOOLS FOR HOPE AND HEALING:

### BUILDING YOUR SELF-CARE TOOLBOX

Leever's innovative series features no-cost programs and activities for cancer patients and caregivers, designed to help them navigate a path toward health and healing, even in the most challenging of times.

Past programs have included chair yoga, meditation, vision boards, breathwork and journaling. Visit [leevercancercenter.org](http://leevercancercenter.org) for upcoming Toolbox workshops.



### HOPE MUTUAL AID GROUP FOR PATIENTS AND THEIR

**LOVED ONES:** monthly, 1st and 3rd Tuesday, 12 PM – 1 PM,  
contact Melissa Seres: 203-575-5511

### JOURNALING: A WAY TO HEAL FROM YOUR CANCER

**EXPERIENCE:** Friday, 10 AM – 11:30 AM, contact Bob Devito:  
203-910-3107

**LOOK GOOD, FEEL BETTER!:** monthly, 1st Tuesday, 1 PM – 3 PM,  
register: [lookgoodfeelbetter.org](http://lookgoodfeelbetter.org), contact Deborah Parkinson:  
203-575-5564

**QUILTS THAT CARE:** monthly, 1st and 3rd Monday,  
6:30 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Deb V: 860-782-1043

**WATERBURY AREA OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly,  
1st Monday, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Bob Baker: 860-248-1116

**WATERBURY AREA THYCA GROUP, A THYROID CANCER  
SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly, last Tuesday, 6:30 PM – 7:30 PM,  
contact Renee Hurne: 203-598-6859 or Dot Torretta: 203-756-3481

**WOMAN TO WOMAN BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP:**  
monthly, 3rd Tuesday, 7 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Theresa Lombardo:  
860-274-2200

Call contact person to confirm that group is as scheduled. Meeting times may be rescheduled to accommodate holidays or special meetings. See [leevercancercenter.org](http://leevercancercenter.org) for ongoing events.