



# Implications of Anthem “White Bagging” Mandate on a Rural Oncology Program

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# Background

- Tahoe Forest Hospital is a 25-bed critical access hospital in Truckee, CA
- In 2006, the Gene Upshaw Memorial Cancer Center opened to provide oncology care
  - Patients were traveling significant distances (1-4 hours) to receive oncology care (nearest CA – based oncology infusion is over 60 miles distant)
  - Road conditions in the area are frequently hazardous, especially in the winter
- The primary service area covers 6 rural counties and approximately 3,500 square miles, reaching the communities of Truckee, North Lake Tahoe, Donner Summit, the Sierra Valley in CA, and Incline Village in NV.
- Due to the unmet need and focus on quality, in-migration from outside the primary service area accounts for over half of new patient visits.
  - Patients served from as far north as Susanville to as far south as Bishop.



# Structure

- 3 Full Time Medical Oncologists
- 1 Full Time Radiation Oncologist
- 9 Infusion Chairs, Hospital Outpatient Department
- Dedicated Oncology Pharmacist
- Pharmacy holds Sterile Compounding License (CA State Board of Pharmacy)
- Due to distance that many patients travel, multiple structures in place to allow for same day assessment and treatment:
  - Integrated rapid CBC and CMP machines (treatment day labs within 1 hour)
  - Infusion NP to assist assessing patients on the day of treatment.
  - Same day adjustment of treatment plan and dosing
- Focus on Quality





# Operational Concerns

- Delivery is not reliable in winter months due to weather and can be compromised by closure of the single major freeway access (I-80)
- On day of treatment, dose may need to be increased (resulting in delay if insufficient dose provided) or decreased (resulting in waste)
  - Due to changes in weight, organ function, toxicity, or as a result of clinical judgement
- Additional staff time and cost to manage patient and insurance specific processes
  - Many drugs are given in combinations where part of treatment would come from different sources.





# Safety Concerns

- Was the drug properly handled and stored?
  - Temperatures in Truckee commonly range from -15F to +95F
  - Current supplier (Cardinal Health) has well established protocols for proper handling and delivery of drugs to our facility
  - Pharmacy keeps basic level or “par level” of key drugs to manage delivery delays
  - Patient specific lab affixed by outside pharmacy
- Separate handling, storage, and management protocols for a specific set of medications for a specific set of patients
  - May be supplied in different concentration, formulation, etc from standard
  - This is not a high reliability process – risk of error is not minimized
  - Liability for new set of potential errors transferred to TFHD staff



# Ethical Concerns

- Delay in care: Inevitable delivery and dose availability failures will result in patients being turned away from care until drug is available
  - Risk of worsening cancer in a few days is disease specific and hard to quantify
  - Risk to psychologic well being of treatment delay is profound
- Distributive Justice: Patients subject to an insurance specific white bagging policy will be treated under a different and arguably riskier protocol than those with different insurance