Introducing Supportive & Palliative Care

Keeping a happy and healthy heart

Meet Melissa
Daughter, mom, wife and cancer survivor
MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

My Friends,

It has been six months since we’ve created The Specialist. We truly hope you have enjoyed receiving the latest announcements and have been finding them informative, entertaining, and empowering. It is your dedication to excellence that has continued to make this exciting initiative possible. In this issue, we recap the events during the months of December and January.

As our radiation oncology and research departments expand, they require great leadership to execute our goals. That is why we proudly announced Dr. Talha Shaikh as Chief of Radiation Oncology and Dr. Richard Zuniga as Chief of Research. Their leadership and expertise will spearhead our efforts to advance radiation oncology and our research department.

We raised $13,835 for our “Adopt-A-Family” holiday fundraiser. Thanks to everyone’s generosity, we were able to give meaningful gifts and dinners to 19 cancer patients and their families in need. Melissa Kishegyi is one of the many deserving recipients whose story you will read about.

With the uncertainty of COVID-19, many of us have questions, so we turned to expert Infectious Disease Specialist, Philip Nizza, DO, who joined us for a Q&A via Zoom to discuss the COVID-19 vaccine and the vaccination process. Many of our staff received their vaccines and I am patiently awaiting our allotment for distribution.

At New York Cancer & Blood Specialists, our efforts impact everyone around us, within our neighborhoods, communities, and cities, and we will continue our mission in conquering cancer, together. With so much happening, it just goes to show when we choose to come together; we can achieve what we all wish for: a healthier, brighter world. I remain so grateful for all each of you do every day.

Cheers,
Dr. Vacirca

Nutrition
Chocolate - healthy or hype?

Supportive & Palliative Care
Announces Isaac Hardoon, DO, as Chief of Palliative Care

New York Cancer & Blood Specialists
Announces Talha Shaikh, MD, MBA, as Chief of Radiation Oncology

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Nutrition Update

Healthy Or Hype?

By Wendy Kaplan, MS, RDN, CDN

In short, chocolate can provide some health-promoting benefits, but there’s more to the picture. Chocolate is made from cocoa beans, which contain flavanols. Flavanols are plant compounds that, in laboratory studies, have shown anti-inflammatory, antidiabetic, anticancer, and neuroprotective effects.

Not all chocolate is created equal. Flavanol content can vary widely from chocolate piece to chocolate piece. Many factors, including where the cocoa bean is grown and how it is harvested, processed, and prepared, affect the final product.

As a general rule, the darker the chocolate, the higher the concentration of flavanols. Manufacturers add milk, sugar, more cocoa butter and other ingredients to their product to enhance the taste and satisfy the sweet tooths of many consumers. Chocolate with the least amount of processing and/or additions will confer the most health-promoting benefits. Chocolate may also contain copper, iron, zinc, the feel-good hormone serotonin, and caffeine.

The jury is still out as to whether or not the amount of the phytochemical we ingest when eating chocolate actually improves our health.

That needs to be weighed against the downsides of eating chocolate such extra calories, fat/saturated fat, etc. Another important fact is that tea and apples also contain the same flavanols as chocolate.

Should you give in to your chocolate-craving desires? I don’t think many go out of their way to eat chocolate specifically for its health benefits, but rather for enjoyment. So yes, enjoy the deliciousness! Choose a bar that’s at least 70% dark chocolate, limit your portion size to 1 oz., and of course consume plenty of fruits, vegetables and other plant foods to reap the health benefits of all the different phytochemicals.

Hey, Peanutbutter Lovers, you’ll want to try this awesome recipe!

Peanut Butter Energy Balls

INGREDIENTS:
Yields: About 18 balls

• 2/3 cup natural creamy peanut butter
• 1 cup old-fashioned oats, plus extra for rolling
• 1 1/2 Tbsp. honey
• 1/4 cup miniature dark chocolate chips, plus extra for rolling

• 1/4 cup flax seeds (ground)

PREPARATION:
• Mix all ingredients in a bowl until well-combined.
• Cover with plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.
• After 30 minutes, roll into approximately 1 inch balls
• Lay out a thin layer of oats and chocolate chips on a cutting board or work surface and roll the balls in the mixture. Finish off by rolling each ball between your hands to pack in the oats and chocolate chips.

Store in the refrigerator until ready to be eaten. Enjoy!

By Lauren McGarty, RD, CDN, BS
We are so proud to have begun providing full-time Supportive and Palliative Care services throughout our cancer centers on Long Island and New York City.

Palliative care, often misconstrued as the end of life or hospice care, is a medical discipline aimed at improving the quality of life for patients with a serious, life-limiting, advanced illness. Our expansion in the integration of palliative care seeks to enhance the quality of care patients receive by focusing on what their goals of care and treatment are. We can provide advanced care planning, identify patient’s wishes, and symptom management in a local, outpatient setting helping patients control pain and enhance their quality of life, which leads to better outcomes.

Isaac Hardoon, DO, Chief of Division, is a renowned physician leading the Supportive and Palliative Care program and providing additional support resources and comprehensive care both in-person and remotely. The program is designed to alleviate some of the physician burdens in managing symptoms and side effects with our team of physical therapists, nutritionists, social workers, and psychologists. Any physician in the community can request a consultation from our palliative care physicians.

Dr. Hardoon is a graduate of Stony Brook University, where he received a Bachelor of Arts in Theater Arts with a Minor in Biology. He obtained his Doctor of Osteopathy from West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine and completed his internship and residency in the Department of Medicine at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn. Dr. Hardoon completed his fellowship in Hospice and Palliative Medicine at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, and for the past 3.5 years, was a Palliative Care Attending Physician and serves as Assistant Professor of Medicine at Albert Einstein School of Medicine.

"Where you live shouldn’t determine your access to the best quality of life and highest quality of care during a chronic illness," said Dr. Jeff Vacirca, CEO of New York Cancer & Blood Specialists. "NYCBS has always been dedicated to comprehensive, holistic care, and palliative medicine is an important addition for our patients who have chronic illnesses. Now, we can empower our patients throughout our offices to make choices about their treatment so they can live the best life possible."

Patients should discuss with their doctor if they believe palliative care would be helpful for them. We are accepting referrals from anyone, including patients, oncology ancillary staff, and primary care physicians.
In a predominately male specialty, Dr. Schulz knew she wanted to be one of the very few women in the field. “I saw an opportunity to make a huge impact on women’s health, and for men who feel more comfortable with a female physician,” she said. “Urology is rife with uncomfortable and often taboo issues.”

Dr. Schulz has been expertly trained in general urology and urological surgery, specializing in women’s health and female urological disorders. Her areas of expertise include advanced treatments targeting prostate health, urologic oncology, sexual and voiding dysfunction, in-office vasectomies, kidney stones, and urinary tract infection management and prevention.

“I am very excited to join a great network of multispecialty physicians that allows us to offer community-based healthcare,” Dr. Schulz said. NY Health’s division of urology targets men’s health, women’s health, cancer care, advanced treatment options for prostate and bladder cancer, and radiation oncology.

Her strong interest in sexual medicine and the diagnosis and treatment of men and women with sexual health concerns has helped her patients improve their quality of life. “I am able to create a safe space to tackle them as a partner with my patients. I approach patient care the way I would want to be approached and treated with compassion, respect, evidence-based medicine, and listening to patient concerns.”

Dr. Schulz completed her undergraduate studies at Stony Brook University before attending the New York College of Osteopathic Medicine. While completing her medical studies, Dr. Schulz earned a Master of Science degree and Pre-Doctoral Academic Medicine Fellowship at The New York Institute of Technology. She was elected to the National Osteopathic Honor Society, Psi Sigma Alpha, and earned a coveted urology residency at Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia.

New York Cancer & Blood Specialists Appoints Chief Radiation Oncologist

New York Cancer & Blood Specialists (NYCBS), announced Talha Shaikh, MD, MBA has been named chief radiation oncologist. Dr. Shaikh will lead the department with new radiation oncology initiatives and developments of clinical strategies and best practices to advance cutting-edge radiation therapies. He will oversee the radiation oncology facilities across the New York region while continuing to provide high-quality care to patients.

As cancer care continues to advance, Dr. Shaikh understands the need to evolve with technology. “My mission is to bring world-class cancer care to patients close to their homes,” said Dr. Shaikh. “NYCBS has been at the forefront of providing superb care for patients throughout the New York area. We have a team of exceptional providers, and I am excited to work closely with them as we continue to develop the radiation oncology practice.”

Board-certified in radiation oncology, Dr. Shaikh graduated from Drexel University College of Medicine. He completed his residency in radiation oncology at the NCI-designated cancer center, Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia, PA, where he also served as chief resident. Simultaneously, Dr. Shaikh completed his MBA at Fox School of Business-Temple University. Dr. Shaikh has been honored with many awards, including the ASCO Conquer Cancer Foundation Merit Award, ASTRO Annual Meeting Travel Award, and ESMO European Lung Cancer Conference Travel Award. He has been invited to give oral presentations at various international conferences and has served as a co-author in numerous publications, including research published in JAMA, JAMA Oncology, European Urology, International Journal of Radiation Oncology, Biology, Physics, and Journal of Thoracic Oncology.

Dr. Shaikh is a highly regarded leader in radiation oncology with eight years of practice, including specialty training. “He brings extraordinary leadership skills and clinical expertise in radiation oncology to our organization,” said Jeff Vacirca, MD, chief executive officer of NYCBS. “We are very excited Dr. Shaikh will now lead our efforts to advance radiation oncology.”
Dr. Richard Zuniga is thrilled to have the opportunity to contribute to the growth and success of the NYCBS research team. "The research department has tremendous potential to make a difference for our patients looking for more than standard care options," Dr. Zuniga said.

NYCBS is at the forefront of cancer care, being a community-based hematology-oncology practice. With such a large patient population and access to amazing novel agents, clinical research helps understand the causes and nuances of different cancers and could revolutionize cancer therapy.

"By identifying clinical trials with great promise and practicing as a cohesive unit, I hope to help the research department reach its full potential," Dr. Zuniga said.

Dr. Zuniga is a board-certified hematologist and oncologist at NYCBS. Before practicing medicine, Dr. Zuniga earned his Medical Degree at Universidad de San Martin de Porres in Peru. Dr. Zuniga completed his residency and his first fellowship at Henry Ford Hospital in Neuro-Oncology, where he also practiced as an Attending Physician. After completing three more fellowships in hematology, oncology, and Drug Development Research at the University of Texas Health Science Center, Dr. Zuniga later practiced as an attending physician. He became the Medical Director of Clinical Research at Lowell General Cancer Center.
Diet and lifestyle can play an important role in your heart health. Eating lean proteins, soluble fiber, unsaturated fats, limiting sweets and salt can help decrease your risk for heart disease.

Cholesterol is a waxy fat like substance that your body produces. It makes new cells, hormones and produces bile, which helps you to digest food. There are two types of cholesterol:

HDL - (good cholesterol) Helps to carry the "bad" cholesterol to the liver where it’s broken down and exits the body.

LDL - (bad cholesterol) Contributes to a fatty buildup in the arteries and forms plaque, thereby reducing blood flow.

Triglyceride is a type of fat that comes from the food in your diet.

Desirable Blood Lipid Levels are:

- Chol- <200 mg/dl
- HDL 60 or higher
- LDL <100 mg/dl
- Triglyceride <149 mg/dl

**Nutritional Tips for a Healthy Heart:**

- Soluble fiber can help lower blood cholesterol levels.
- To get more soluble fiber fiber in your diet eat more: oatmeal, oat bran, barley, beans, asparagus, brussel sprouts, sweet potatoes, apples, pears, mangoes, prunes, apricots, oranges.
- Include foods rich in Omega-3 fatty acids. Eat more: mackerel, halibut, salmon and sardines.
- Choose unsaturated oils like olive or avocado oil.
- Include flax seeds, walnuts, chia seeds, leafy green vegetables in your diet.
- Avoid hydrogenated oils in baked goods, coffee creamers, packaged snacks, margarines.
- Avoid high sodium foods such as processed meats, cheeses, fast food, convenience foods.
- Limit alcohol

3 **FUN FACTS**

- The average heart is the size of a fist in an adult.
- Your heart will beat about 115,000 times each day.
- Your heart pumps about 2,000 gallons of blood every day.
When a novel prompted her to get a breast screening, Melissa Kishegyi, 44, embarked on a new chapter in her own story.

In June 2010, Melissa had a seeming brush with fate when she discovered a novel, Firefly Lane by Kristin Hannah, on her colleague’s desk. Melissa, then 34, a bookworm, a teacher, and pregnant with her second child, never would have imagined that her love for reading would save her life.

In an improbable twist, a character in the novel was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer. After reading about signs associated with the disease, and noticing slight redness, swelling, and bridging in her own breasts, Melissa decided to see her obstetrician for a screening.

Her obstetrician referred her to The Fortunato Breast Health Center at Mather Hospital for a sonogram. After finding swollen lymph nodes on her collarbone, Melissa explained to the doctor about the book she read and her belief that she, too, had inflammatory breast cancer. Contrary to her intuition, the doctor suspected Mastitis, an inflammation of breast tissue that sometimes involves an infection.

Melissa was sent to a general surgeon for antibiotics. A common misconception about antibiotics is that they don’t work on cancer. So when the infection calmed, and the redness went away, her lymph nodes became softer. The doctor performed a biopsy which confirmed her suspicion after all. Melissa was diagnosed with stage III inflammatory breast cancer.

The day following her diagnosis, Melissa had an appointment with an oncologist, Dr. Jeff Vacirca. Confident with his care, Dr. Vacirca put Melissa on a six-round course of chemotherapy so that she could have a full-term pregnancy. About four months later, Melissa welcomed her newborn son, Charlie, to her new family of four.

After giving birth to Charlie, Melissa finished chemotherapy treatment and began surgery. She underwent a double mastectomy, radiation, and reconstruction. As she healed, she began to set her sights on returning to work. By November 2011, Melissa had completed her treatments but was still on Herceptin, oral chemotherapy. Another year passed and Melissa continued to make plans to return to work. She even began to look at houses closer to her school district.

A second diagnosis
In January 2012, Melissa knew something was off. She found herself stuck in the hospital during a snowstorm with a brain tumor. “I remember it was 11:30 pm, and Dr. Vacirca called to let me know he saw my brain scan and that I was going to be fine. He saved both my child’s life and my life once, so I trusted him,” she recalled.

The tumor was removed and Melissa was given oral chemotherapy and radiation yet again. Temporarily paralyzed on the right side of her body, Melissa was unable to walk or eat. She lost her hair a second time due to radiation and began physical therapy to regain her motor skills. Now, her biggest challenge is walking and maintaining balance but she continues to just make the best of it.

Confident in her future, time has a new meaning for Melissa. She credits her success to the individualized care that she received. “I’m able to live my life freely because I know that no matter what happens, I have a strong medical team behind me,” she expressed.

Melissa’s experience with breast cancer fueled her interest in advocacy and support for breast cancer patients. Currently, she volunteers for Mondays at Racine and Hope for Two, The Pregnant with Cancer Network. Melissa attends Young Survival Coalition conferences, and enjoys speaking to other women in similar shoes. She recently attended a retreat in Utah for breast cancer survivors where she met her new best friend.

We can all make a difference in the fight against cancer by being aware and pledging to help others. “Live in the present,” Melissa urges.
The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in major disruptions to cancer care worldwide, including cancer screenings. These interruptions led to a surge in demand for cancer services that had the potential to overwhelm healthcare systems. However, despite the challenges from COVID-19, New York Cancer & Blood Specialists’ (NYCBS) increased focus on accessibility, prevention, and early diagnosis of cancer, helped increase patient resilience by mitigating fear, and ensure patients’ continuity of care.

At NYCBS, newly diagnosed patients are able to see a doctor within 24-hours. The facilities are open seven days a week, holidays included, and have remained open throughout the entirety of the pandemic. Even when their doors close at night, the doctors remain on-call 24-7 so patients can remain in contact with their physician at all times.

New York Cancer & Blood Specialists’ integrated, multidisciplinary approach provides better care for the “whole” patient with cancer. News of a cancer diagnosis can be distressing for many reasons, including facing a potentially life-threatening disease, fear of the unknown, and practical hardships.

Psychosocial care among patients with cancer and those at high risk for developing cancer aim to recognize and address the effects of cancer screening and treatment on the mental status, emotional well-being, and quality of life for patients, family members, and caregivers. NYCBS’ highly trained oncologists and hematologists, along with additional services like infusional therapy, diagnostic services, social work, pharmacy, psychological services, nutrition, and many other amenities treat patients as a whole and not just their disease.

“Patients never need to worry about receiving care,” said Dr. William LiPera, a board-certified hematologist/oncologist at NYCBS. “If a patient goes to the hospital, we will meet them there. We provide treatment any day of the week, ensuring that our patients never forgo necessary care.”

NYCBS is dedicated to providing resilience-fostering factors in a comfortable and caring environment throughout every stage of the cancer continuum. By strengthening personal and social resources and enabling effective coping strategies, we can better improve health outcomes.

“Cancer doesn’t sleep, and neither do we,” Dr. LiPera said.

To schedule an appointment at New York Cancer & Blood Specialists, please call 1-833-CANCER9.
The Bulletin Board

Social Work

The Social Work department was able to successfully assist patients in certifying/re-certifying a minimum of 225 Medical Marijuana patients to date. Additional achievements included assisting a minimum of 96 patients with completed New York State Handicap applications. Going forward, the Social Work Department is also working to activate a new program that enables patients or anyone with durable equipment (Wheelchairs, Walkers, etc.) to donate equipment. This equipment would then pass onto any patient who finds themselves in need of durable equipment but cannot afford it. This program is still in development, but once operational, it should be a huge benefit to all parties involved.

Radiation Oncology

Stereotactic body radiotherapy and stereotactic radiosurgery are being offered in our Bronx, Patchogue, Setauket, and Riverhead Radiation Oncology locations. These techniques deliver high doses of radiation to a small target, typically in 1-5 treatments for certain cancer types.

Get Vaccinated

COVID-19 has impacted us all. This deadly disease carries devastating health effects, especially for those who are immunocompromised. You can help prevent COVID-19 by getting vaccinated. We strongly encourage those who suffer from a chronic illness to get vaccinated. Vaccinations are at no cost to you!

The Specialist Is Now Digital!

Have you heard the news? If not, you can now check out The Specialist on our website! We’re so excited to inform you of what’s happening around NYCBS. Simply visit nycancer.com and find within our News & Events tab!

Review of The Month

I have been a patient of Dr. Gruenstein for years. He has a wonderful bedside manner, a great sense of humor and is very thorough with all of his testing. His staff is always upbeat. - Barbara

Julie Plantamura, RN, MSN, FNPC, AOCNP

Recently obtained her AOCNP certification! “The science behind hematologic and oncologic diseases is fascinating and ever-changing. Continuing education is how we stay on top of the unprecedented advancements in our field. I could not imagine doing anything different with my career other than providing the best care to hematology-oncology patients.”

Julie practices at our 347 and Route 112 locations.

Philip Nizza, DO

On Tuesday, January 12, infectious disease specialist, Dr. Philip Nizza, spoke to our staff via Zoom to discuss the importance of the COVID-19 vaccine. He generously answered questions and provided clarity surrounding COVID.

Years of Service with NYCBS

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Employee of the Month

CONGRATULATIONS TO KATHLEEN TISCHLER AS OUR EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH!

Quote Of The Month

"It’s about focusing on the fight and not the fright."
- Robin Roberts

Adopt-A-Family

For many years, Geri Shumway, who was a Chemo Scheduler in our Setauket office, would raise funds to “Adopt a Family” during the holiday season to provide a holiday meal, and gifts for their loved ones. This year, in her honor and memory, we were able to continue this selfless tradition and raise $13,835 in funds to provide 19 families with a traditional holiday dinner and gifts for the entire household!

The holiday dinners were donated and delivered by our dear friends at Garden City Pizza, Bagel Express and Felico’s and the gifts were purchased, wrapped, and delivered by our staff at the NY Cancer Foundation, as well as our physician liaisons.

All of the families were truly touched by the generosity and grateful for the blessings that they received.
New Hires

December

Alexandra Morabiot (Receptionist)
Alexandra Ruiz (Call Center)
Amanda Glotzer (LPN)
Ana Balaioardo (Lab MA)
Angela Rinaldi (Surgical Coordinator)
Angelica Vazquez (MA)
Bianny Vasquez (MA)
Cara Wade (Lab MA)
Carisa Montalvo (Operator)
Dana Valdakis (Ultrason Tech)
Danielle Siebert (Call Center)

January

Alyssa Arias (LPN)
Angela Szegin (MA)
Annmarie Mielko (MA)
Britney Lynch (NP)
Cherylann Webster (Lab Assistant)
Chyna Legros (Patient Operator)
Crystal DelRiccio (RN)
Dr. Darren Kaufman (Nephrologist)

Open Positions

Medical Assistants
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

CAT SCAN (CT) Technologist
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Nurse Practitioners (NP) / Physician’s Assistants (PA)
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN)
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Medical Front Desk Receptionist
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Flow Technician
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Chief of Hematology/Oncology for Academic Center in Brooklyn Hospital
Contact: Eric Jackson
eric.jackson@oneoncology.com

Staff Hematologist/Medical Oncologist Needed Brooklyn, NY at our Brooklyn Hospital Location
Contact: Eric Jackson
eric.jackson@oneoncology.com

Medical Front Desk Receptionist (New York Health)
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Medical Assistants (New York Health)
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Research Coordinator
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Benefits Analytics Manager
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Corporate Controller
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com

Development & Training Specialist Eastern / Western Region
Contact: Nick Giampaolo
ngiampaolo@nycancer.com

Credentialing Specialist
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com


Dr. Charles G. Bleecher (Physician)
Decenia Fernandez (Receptionist)
Denise Jones (LPN)
Gabrielle Redding (Lab MA)
Ginamarie Surlea (Unit Coordinator)
Julianna Stickley (Receptionist)
Kara Ragone (Radiology Scheduler)
Kevin Cohen (MRI Technologist)
Kristin Murphy (Receptionist)

Joseph Cahill (Medical Billing Associate)
Marie Ulysse (Receptionist)
Morell Brown (Call Center)
Nicholas Patti (Lab Aide)
Noel Brooks (Receptionist)
Patricia Maldonado (Receptionist)
Samantha Young (PT)
Shavon Saunders (RN)
Stephanie Nieves (Receptionist)
Sunshine Guarino (LPN)
Trishell Vargas (CCM MA)
Younghie Jung (RN)

Denise Clarke (Office Manager)
Duran Murphy (LPN)
Elliot Nadelson (Urologist)
Jacqueline Devery (AA)
Jennifer Guamanarti (MA)
Jessica Acuna (Call Center)
Jose DaCosta (Lab MA)
Hannah Longboat (Patient Operator)
Hilal Dietrich (Lab Tech)
Kristen Bracciodieta (Office Manager)

Kristina Vaiano (LPN)
Oumlissa Persaud (Lab Tech)
Michael Illickal (Research Coordinator)
Monterrey Miller (AA)
Patrick Williams (Inventory Control Associate)
Rachel Webman (Surgeon)
Robert Golder (Lab MA)
Yerlyn Caba (Receptionist)

PET/CT SCANNER
Full Time/Part Time/Per Diem
Contact: Robert Nicoletti
rnicoletti@nycancer.com
OUR PATIENTS & THEIR FAMILIES

Our patients and their families tell the story of conquering cancer like no other. They help us connect, inspire, and empower. If you know a patient or have a family member who would like to make an impact and share their experience with us, please have them contact marketing@nycancer.com.