

## A New Center to Navigate Cancer Care

### HEALTH CARE: Medical Oncology Associates of SD Opens in La Jolla

■ By KAREN PEARLMAN

**SAN DIEGO** – Medical Oncology Associates of San Diego, one of the leading independent oncology practices in Southern California, has expanded with a new cancer center in La Jolla.

It is the group's fifth cancer care center in San Diego County since it opened with just one site under the direction of **Dr. Alfred Saleh** in 1983.

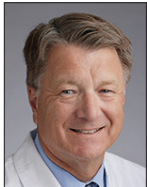
Medical Oncology Associates of San Diego (MOASD) offers personalized care and support for cancer patients and their families, providing a range of services including detection, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up care. Its facilities are designed to meet the needs of cancer patients, with on-site registration, physician offices, exam rooms and infusion centers – all under one roof.

**Dr. Charles Redfern**, president of MOASD, who joined group in 2000 and has been president since 2011, said that in 2022 when the group joined **OneOncology**, a management services organization, it had seven full-time medical oncologists. Now in addition to its five cancer care clinics adjacent to local hospitals, MOASD has 10 physicians, two Family Nurse Practitioners, one Nurse Practitioner and 62 support staff countywide.

The collective group sees about 1,800 new patients annually.

Redfern said the staff takes to heart “what Dr. Saleh would always say, ‘It’s about the patients.’”

“He’d say, ‘That’s what we’re here for. We’re doctors. We take care of patients and we take care of them as best as we can. You’re their best advocate. You’re the one they’re coming to. Be there all the time for them. All the other stuff is crazy noise.’” Redfern said. “And it only gets worse with insurance companies, hospitals, politics, whatever. Yes, we talk about all that and you’ve got to deal with it, but it’s secondary. It’s secondary to caring for the patients.”



**Dr. Charles Redfern**  
Oncologist, President  
Medical Oncology  
Associates of  
San Diego



Cooper the licensed therapy dog with Medical Oncology Associates of San Diego, tends to one of the practice's patients Lynn Myers. MOASD just opened a new site in La Jolla. Photo by Dr. Marie Shieh



Some of the practicing members of Medical Oncology Associates of San Diego include, back row, left to right: Kristen Rice, MD; Michelle Davis, NP; Charles Redfern, MD; James Coggan, DO; Lisa Obregon, NP; Sabina Wallach, MD; and Marie Shieh, MD; and bottom row, left to right: Alfred Saleh, MD; Jennifer Fisher, MD; Heather Tracy, MD; Casie Shenoy, MD; Steven Kossman, MD; and Monica Stuhmiller, NP. Photo courtesy Medical Oncology Associates of San Diego

“Dr. Saleh said, ‘You’re going to feel great about what you do, and the practice will grow.’ And so they have grown, we have grown. They added two doctors in the late 1980s and then I joined in the late ‘90s... and we’ve continued to grow.”

MOASD’s main 9,000-square-foot clinic at **Sharp Memorial Hospital** has 20 infusion chairs for people needing chemotherapy and other treatments. It also maintains offices next to **East Campus Medical Center** at **UC San Diego Health** (formerly Alvarado Hospital), **Coronado Hospital** and **Scripps Mercy Hospital**.

MOASD’s business model focuses on providing comprehensive cancer care, including clinical trials, in-house pharmacy, and laboratory services. MOASD emphasizes value-based contracting, aiming to lower the cost of care while improving patient outcomes.

#### Medicare Expenditures

Redfern said one of the pluses of MOASD is that patients and their families have access to financial counselors and are able to access support, one of the main outside, additional stressors involved in cancer treatment. He said about 40% of its patients go through Medicare for payment needs, and another 40% through managed care plans.

OneOncology reports that a study analyzing 2022 Medicare claims data across five medical specialties – cardiology, gastroenterology, medical oncology, orthopedics and urology – found that Medicare expenditures for patients in private equity-affiliated practices or independent practices were, on average, 9.8% lower than for beneficiaries in hospital-owned practices.

A study by **Avalere** found that after an unaffiliated physician joined a private equity-affiliated independent setting, Medicare spending decreased in the following year. Conversely, when an unaffiliated physician transitioned to a hospital system, expenditures increased.

Generally, said **Eric Hoffman** of OneOncology, cancer care is less expensive in physician

offices compared to hospitals because of the significantly higher facility fees charged by hospitals for administering treatments like chemotherapy, which leads to higher overall costs for patients in hospitals.

Essentially, Hoffman argues, hospitals of ten mark up the price of services due to their overhead costs, while physician offices typically have lower overhead and can offer similar care at a lower price.

#### MOASD in La Jolla, Beyond

The La Jolla clinic opened on Feb. 3 and has been crafted in partnership with oncologist and hematologist **Dr. Sabina Wallach**, who has been affiliated with **Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla** and **Scripps Memorial Hospital Encinitas**.

The partnership with MOASD allows Wallach to expand the practice’s reach and enhance her ability to deliver high-quality cancer care throughout the county, Redfern said.

Wallach is joined at the La Jolla center by a team of healthcare professionals that includes **Dr. Marie Shieh**, **Dr. Heather Tracy**, **Dr. James Coggan** and **Michelle Davis**, FNP. Like the others under the MOASD umbrella, the clinic offers a full spectrum of cancer care services, from early detection and diagnosis to treatment and ongoing support, including access to innovative clinical trials.

Redfern said that Dr. Wallach, who has been running the site on her own, “has consistently demonstrated exceptional care, and we look forward to expanding our team with additional highly skilled oncologists and hematologists to further enhance the quality of care in the La Jolla area.”

He said that Dr. Wallach and the rest of the doctors at MOASD are able to practice their specializations in particular types of oncology, bringing a concentrated focus to the patient and their caregivers. He said while they don’t work with the company directly, among its methods of care is through **Illumina** technology.

Redfern also said that being able to commit to patients’ needs quickly is also something in which MOASD excels – seeing them in a matter of days when necessary.

“We’ve also made another commitment that’s huge,” Redfern said. “Through OneOncology, we’re now offering clinical trials, which were also offered through some kinds

of hospital systems. We’re now offering more of them, and clinical trials are really important to patients. Sometimes it’s access to new drugs or potential new drugs. I think we recognize the value in that.”

#### Going Extra Mile on Four Legs

One of the La Jolla specialists, **Dr. Shieh**, founded and runs the nearly 1-year-old **MOASD Therapy Pet** program, which has been transformative for many patients.

Shieh said she believes “one of the strengths of community oncology, and what MOASD really excels at is giving our patients the feeling that they are truly seen.”

“To us, they are not just another number in the complicated, oftentimes impossible-to-navigate medical system,” Shieh said. “From the first contact with the new patient coordinator, to the front desk, to the medical assistants, to the nurses and doctors and beyond, we strive to care for our patients as if they are family.”

Shieh said the pet therapy program is another way patients feel more like family.

The program began when she started bringing her own dog, Cooper, to the office on quieter days.

“When I saw how much joy he brought to the staff, I had a feeling he would also provide great comfort and stress relief to our patients,” she said. “We passed the Canine Good Citizen test and became a certified therapy pet team with **Love on a Leash**. We’ve only been certified since June 2024 but I’ve already seen the wonderful impact Cooper has had on our patients.” ■

#### Medical Oncology Associates of San Diego AMG, Inc.

**FOUNDED:** 1983  
**FOUNDER:** Dr. Alfred Saleh  
**OWNERS:** MOASD Board of Directors  
**HEADQUARTERS:** San Diego  
**BUSINESS:** Medical Specialty Care  
**EMPLOYEES:** 75  
**WEBSITE:** oncologysandiego.com  
**CONTACT:** 858-637-7888  
**NOTABLE:** MOASD recognizes the importance of providing all services under one roof, with offices housing a medical oncology infusion center, physician offices and exam rooms, and on-site registration