

IN CONVERSATION WITH

CHAITALI S. NANGIA, MD

Co-Director, NK Cell Therapy Research
Hoag Family Cancer Institute

“Hoag is a place where I can deliver the research and patient care I always wanted to deliver.”



What influenced you to come to Hoag, and when did you come?

I came to Hoag in May 2020, at the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a volcanic time to transition, but I feel Hoag provides the best care to our community. I knew it was where I wanted to practice. The research opportunities available and Hoag’s involvement in the community are unparalleled. I can’t imagine bringing clinical trials to an academic institution at the same speed; there are typically so many roadblocks. At Hoag, physicians have a refreshingly ample amount of support from administration, which makes delivering high-quality care more effective. It’s a lifelong goal of mine to move the needle forward and make an impact, and I’m able to accomplish this at Hoag.

What drew you to specialize in medical oncology?

I first trained in internal medicine and saw oncology as an opportunity to provide a continuity of care. I get to know patients over decades and become part of their families. My specialties are breast, head and neck cancers. It’s incredibly rewarding to not only change the course of the disease but also see patients live life to the fullest. Even during the pandemic, most of my patients came in for treatments—only about 20% were telehealth patients. We are always very cautious with cancer patients due to their lowered immune response, especially so with COVID, but being able to interact and sustain our connection with them is so important.

What do you think will be the most exciting development in clinical trials in 2022?

Hoag is the first hospital in Orange County to enroll patients in a phase I trial using natural killer (NK) cell therapy for triple-negative breast cancer. These NK cells activate the body’s own immune system to create antibodies that fight cancer. So far, we’ve had amazing response rates—double or triple what was seen previously—and we’re quickly advancing to a phase II trial. The I-SPY trial for patients with breast cancer is very exciting. It’s a coveted multidisciplinary trial that requires a fine-tuned orchestra of specialized clinicians. Twelve arms of the trial focus on different types of breast cancer. Eventually, we’ll expand to other tumor sites, such as the lungs. Because the trial is extremely complex, not many health care institutions have the expertise or infrastructure to support it. Hoag has both, and a major contributor to the trial’s success at Hoag is our focus on patient-centered care.

What sets Hoag apart, or what do you think is the best thing about Hoag?

The patient care Hoag provides is truly exceptional. Nurse navigators, social workers, clinicians—everyone comes together to form an amazing, multidisciplinary team. The programs available to patients often can’t be found anywhere else. Patients have access to genetic screenings, high-risk and survivorship programs and incredible logistical support resources made available through philanthropy. We walk them through every step of the process.

How has philanthropy contributed to your work at Hoag?

Philanthropy, and the partnership between physicians and the Hoag Hospital Foundation, allows us to build the infrastructure we need to support our research. With the help of philanthropic funds, we added a nurse practitioner to the team and a data coordinator for clinical trials. The impact this continues to have on patient care is tremendous.

What do you like to do when you are not at Hoag?

I have two young kids who love music. We all play different instruments. On a typical Friday night, we jam together in the house as a family band and create new music. It’s a lot of fun, and the kids steal the show. I also enjoy yoga and meditation. I’m just getting into boxing, which is both excellent exercise and therapy.

Education and Training

Medical Doctor

Lady Hardinge Medical College

New Delhi, India

Internal Medicine Residency

Rush Resurrection Medical Center

Melrose Park, IL

Hematology/Oncology Fellowship

Henry Ford Health System

Detroit, MI

Board Certifications

American Board of Hematology Oncology Medicine

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