

Donna Karan's Urban Zen Foundation Creates Optimal Healing Environment for Cancer Patients

A unique pilot program will enhance the care of hospitalized cancer patients at Beth Israel—thanks to a generous grant from the Urban Zen Foundation, a program launched and sponsored by internationally acclaimed fashion designer Donna Karan.

The \$850,000 grant from the Urban Zen Foundation will allow Beth Israel to transform its medical oncology unit on 9 Dazian into an “Optimal Healing Environment” for its cancer patients, families, and caregivers. Under the leadership of Woodson Merrell, MD, Chairman of the Department of Integrative Medicine and M. Anthony Fisher, Director of Integrative Medicine at the Continuum Center for Health and Healing, the Urban Zen initiative at Beth Israel will be built around a menu of complementary and alternative healing therapies, especially yoga.

“Our dream and our goal is to treat the patient and their loved ones, not just the disease, and to have techniques of Eastern healing, proper nutrition, yoga, and meditation combined with Western medicine to fight illness,” Ms. Karan said. “The Urban Zen Foundation is proud to work with Beth Israel’s exceptional staff and Rodney and Colleen Saidman Yee, celebrated yoga masters, to create a new model of integrative cancer care that can be replicated nationally and even internationally.”

Physical renovations of the 9 Dazian oncology floor will include the creation of a special healing space for yoga, meditation, and prayer, all in collaboration with Ms. Karan, architect David Fratianne and feng-shui master Alex Stark.



Morton P. Hyman, Woodson Merrell, MD, Christy Turlington, Ed Burns, and Donna Karan at the 2005 Continuum Center for Health and Healing Benefit

“The optimal healing environment will provide access to a quiet, calm, nurturing space for patients, families and staff,” said Jeanne Kenney, Program Manager of the Urban Zen initiative at Beth Israel. “9 Dazian is a wonderful floor, and the care provided there is already exceptional. The Urban Zen Foundation is helping us to enhance it.”

Yoga therapists trained by Yee and Saidman Yee will offer bedside yoga and relaxation guidance for patients and families. In addition to training its nursing staff in holistic practices, Beth Israel will expand the availability of other complementary medical therapies such as Reiki, healing touch, guided imagery, and aromatherapy.

The grant also allows for the hiring of a patient navigator, whose job will be to guide patients and their families through the often complicated maze of cancer care and to help them understand and access the unique services offered on 9 Dazian.

“Continuum Cancer Centers is committed to the highest standards of patient care and the application of all effective therapies—including complementary and alternative therapies—to help treat and heal patients,” says Louis B. Harrison, MD,

Clinical Director of the Continuum Cancer Centers of New York and Chairman of the Charles and Bernice Blitman Department of Radiation Oncology at Beth Israel and the Department of Radiation Oncology at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt. “We’re delighted to be partnering with the Urban Zen Foundation and the Continuum Center for Health and Healing on this groundbreaking pilot project that is sure to enhance our world-class programs in cancer care.”

A major component of this project is an in-depth evaluation study, which will measure patient experience, clinical outcomes and cost savings. This research will help to determine the clinical and cost effectiveness of this intervention, which is important in establishing it as a replicable model for cancer care.

“This is an incredible opportunity for Beth Israel to gain recognition as a center of excellence for integrative cancer care, a model which is sure to become widespread as more and more people begin to appreciate holistic healing modalities,” Dr. Merrell said. “We are incredibly fortunate to have Donna Karan’s support in making this vision a reality.”