

Apple a Day – Meet Dr. Mark Cooper, Radiation Oncologist

July 2022

Katie Johnson ([00:00](#)):

Good morning and welcome to apple a day Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness show, where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Dr. Mark Cooper. He is the newest member of the medical staff at Lake Region Medical Group and at our cancer center here in Fergus falls. Good morning, Dr. Cooper.

Dr. Mark Cooper ([00:19](#)):

Good Morning. How are you Katie?

Katie Johnson ([00:21](#)):

I am doing well. And I'm so glad that you were willing to take a few minutes to sit down and talk with us today and let us introduce you to our community. So let's just start with a little bit of background about you. Where are you from originally and, and what does your medical career look like? Up until joining us here at the cancer center?

Dr. Mark Cooper ([00:41](#)):

Well, I'm originally from Detroit, Michigan. However, I've lived in the area in Fargo for 32 years, over over 32 years now. So I consider myself from the area. I feel more like Minnesotan or North Dakotan than a Michigander.

Katie Johnson ([01:07](#)):

I'd be curious, thinking back to when you decided to pursue a career in medicine, what was it that made you number one, pursue medicine, but probably more so oncology and radiation oncology?

Dr. Mark Cooper ([01:23](#)):

Well, I was always kind of fascinated by science and my mother was a elementary science elementary school science teacher. And I don't know if that's what got me interested or if it was a genetic thing. Or both. And as I evolved and I grew, I, there were certain things I was interested in and of course you'd see the medical shows and I'd say, oh, that's kind of interesting too. But I actually, earlier in my career in college, I was thinking of engineering, but I also had medicine in the back of my mind. Later in the engineering courses they started getting a little too abstract to me. And I said, you know, I don't know if I really like this. And so I decided to pursue medical school and after entering medical school, of course I entered medical school thinking I wanna do surgery, maybe neurosurgery. But during my experiences as medical school and well, mainly medical school rotations, I realized that might not be my area... it wasn't as appealing. So it was really late in my, in medical school that I actually stumbled across radiation oncology because you don't typically get - pardon the pun - exposed to it. <Laugh>. But I stumbled upon it during a radiology rotation and I actually went into the department and kind of asked around, well, what goes on in here? And then I arranged to do a few week actually a month rotation and that really sparked my interest. But before then I was thinking about diagnostic radiology, but seeing at that time, diagnostic radiology was mainly looking at x-rays and not necessarily a lot of interaction with patients. And I saw that radiation oncology combined both of those things. So that made it attractive to me.

Katie Johnson (04:00):

Sure and just was the right fit. I'm sure that you know from your time here so far and that this cancer center is a special place. As I mentioned now almost 12 years old, the fundraising to, to build this cancer was cancer center was done almost entirely with donations from our community. And the staff here is, is really committed and amazing too. I'm wondering just in general, how does that make you feel about joining this team and, and working in this place?

Dr. Mark Cooper (04:33):

When this opportunity became available, I was interested because I liked the nature of the medical system here. It's more locally governed and I think the community's really involved with it, and that was really refreshing to see on a much larger scale than when you have a institution that's run by a corporation outside of the area. So, yeah, it was something that was appealing to me and I could also see it in the patients. I saw that they appreciated having this facility and state of the art treatment, where they live. I feel privileged to be part of the team here and hopefully can take it to a good level and add something to it.

Katie Johnson (05:35):

Yeah. You just kind of reiterated some of the things that, that we say set us apart and make us different being of the community by the community, governed by a community board and so much community involvement in funding, this cancer center and the difference that makes to patients is nice to hear that an outsider can see and express that too.

Dr. Mark Cooper (05:57):

<Affirmative>, I'm an insider now!

Katie Johnson (05:59):

You're an insider now. That's right. And we're so glad!

There's been some significant investments in technology to kind of add to you need really good people who have really good experience in and education in oncology, but you also need the best equipment, especially in radiation oncology to have a phenomenal cancer program. And there's been a recent investment in a new linear accelerator. Tell us what that means.

Dr. Mark Cooper (06:25):

Yes. And that's right. You have to have the people, but you do have to have the tools as well. Right. And luckily we have some state of the art equipment with the new linear accelerator, the variant Tru beam edge, and it's capabilities are impressing me and I think will benefit patients greatly. At my former practice place we had very good equipment, but this is another level. Wow. So I've been impressed and excited about working with the equipment here and being able to give state of the art care.

Katie Johnson (07:19):

Yeah, absolutely and this is like brand spanking new, pretty much started in service the same time that you started. We had to close down radiation oncology for a few months to install such a large piece of equipment in a vault and make that upgrade. And at the same time we've been working on adding a new piece of equipment called a pet CT scanner. My understanding is that's going to be happening soon.

Can you give us an update on when that might be and exactly what a difference will that make to be able to have a pet CT here?

Dr. Mark Cooper ([07:55](#)):

Well, I think it'll be a wonderful asset. More typically in order to get PET imaging, we have to either send to the radiology department, a separate department, or you have mobile units that do it. But I think having it in the department here will allow us to have better direction over what we want. And the care will be more seamless. We can do it here. Again, we can assess things immediately and I think it will facilitate more seamless care.

Katie Johnson ([08:48](#)):

For sure. Being able to do it all in the same building is a benefit to the patient and, and that'll be happening later this summer, the way it sounds?

Dr. Mark Cooper ([08:57](#)):

Yes, the installation is just gearing up. We had to get some permits that the state took a long time to deliver, but we got the news that they gave it the green light. So I think over the next few weeks, it may take four or five weeks for the install, and we'll have that available.

Katie Johnson ([09:24](#)):

Well, that's really exciting. We'll definitely be talking more about that as that happens. Tell me, what is it that you like most about being an oncologist?

Dr. Mark Cooper ([09:34](#)):

Well, I think it's my interaction with my patients because typically during a radiation, on a radiation course, we see patients daily Monday through Friday, at least for several weeks. And so it's the relationships, it's the ability to help people, it's the ability to help them understand what's going on in a scary time and help them through this process. That's to me the most, that's the most rewarding thing.

Katie Johnson ([10:13](#)):

What a privilege it is. What about when you're not working? What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Dr. Mark Cooper ([10:21](#)):

I always work <laugh> it doesn't seem like I've had a lot of free time lately for some reason, but I like scuba diving. That's probably one of my favorite things to do. I will try to golf occasionally, but that doesn't go very well. Traveling, reading, eating. I enjoy and collect wine.

Katie Johnson ([10:55](#)):

Interesting. What's the most interesting or beautiful place you've scuba dived?

Dr. Mark Cooper ([11:03](#)):

Ooh. I would say there've been a few, but I probably one of my favorite is the Maldives. But yeah, I, like the south Pacific area too. But those are very wonderful areas to dive.

Katie Johnson ([11:24](#)):

Nice. Maybe before we wrap up, is there's anything else you'd like people to know about you or your practice or your philosophy of care as an oncology provider before we wrap up?

Dr. Mark Cooper ([11:37](#)):

No, I don't think there's anything special. I mean, I just look at it as if I were going into it, how I would want things to be explained to me, or a relative of mine. And I look at each patient like that and I try to be mindful that this is a scary time. And a lot of times you have to repeat things many times over again. Because even though you think you're conveying information, sometimes again, you have to realize that that that person is sort of traumatized and may not pick it up, and so reinforcing it is important.

Katie Johnson ([12:36](#)):

Yeah. Having that that patience and that that special presence to be able to understand where someone is coming from and treating them like, like you said, like family. I think so often we say that we do seek to do that here and quite often it's because we are. You know, it's either your friend or your family member, or a neighbor who is the one that you're caring or treating in a community this size. And we're so glad to welcome you to the Lake Region Healthcare family, to the cancer center family. And again, thanks for taking some time to visit with us. We look forward to hearing more from you through the years.

Dr. Mark Cooper ([13:20](#)):

Well, thank you very much. It's a privilege to be here and I look forward to it.

Katie Johnson ([13:27](#)):

Excellent. Dr. Mark Cooper, radiation oncologist, the newest member at the Lake Region Medical Group and Lake Region Healthcare's Cancer Care and Research Center.... my guest today on Apple a Day. Both Dr. Cooper and Katie Johnson this morning, reminding you, we are here for you always. Have a great day.