

# Partnering with American Oncology Network Helped Zangmeister Cancer Center Improve Revenue While Retaining Independence

## About Zangmeister Cancer Center

Located in Columbus, Ohio, the Zangmeister Cancer Center offers comprehensive cancer and hematology treatments in three locations close to home. The clinic adheres to a holistic approach while providing outpatient treatment for cancer and blood disorders. Other services provided at the clinic include diagnostic imaging, offering most patients access to all of their cancer care under one roof.

Designed for easy access and patient comfort, the clinic also offers chemotherapy treatment and other infusions, targeted therapy and immunotherapy, laboratory services, a specialty pharmacy, care coordination including social services and access to cancer clinical trials. Zangmeister's 11 highly skilled and compassionate physicians use the latest advancements in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer and blood disorders. Zangmeister Cancer Center prides itself on providing the most innovative cancer care available while meeting the physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs of patients. The clinic's palliative team often serves as their patients' advocate, helping them understand and manage the issues and problems that accompany the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.



- 11** Board-certified physicians
- Eight** advanced practitioners
- Holistic approach
- Diagnostic imaging
- Palliative care team

## THE CHALLENGE: Increasing Revenue While Retaining Independence

The physicians at Zangmeister Cancer Center identified a number of future needs they considered priorities. Among them was finding a way to continue providing cost-effective care without sacrificing their autonomy.

“Zangmeister wanted to be able to continue providing good patient care in the community without having to send patients to an institutional setting, where the costs would be higher,” said Christine Pfaff, RPh, AON's senior regional director of operations. Pfaff was Zangmeister's associate practice director when the clinic entered into the partnership with the American Oncology Network (AON).

The clinic was also interested in adopting the value-based care (VBC) model and now-retired oncology care model and strengthening its revenue stream, especially through pharmacy services. Under the existing structure, lack of contracts with key payers meant Zangmeister was filling just about half of the prescriptions its clinical team was writing — and was still responsible for managing dosages and any side effects patients may experience from those medications.

“We were managing the patients, but those prescription revenues were going somewhere else,” said Pfaff.

## THE SOLUTION: A Network Where Physicians Retain Autonomy and Plenty More

Zangmeister Cancer Center ultimately partnered with AON in January of 2019. AON checked many boxes for Zangmeister, including setting the stage for implementation of the VBC model and now-retired OCM and strengthening its revenue stream. Most importantly, partnering with AON would still allow the clinic's physicians to practice independently, making care decisions based on what was in the best interest of their patients.

"Small groups can sometimes have concerns about losing autonomy and independence if they join a corporate program," said Jeanna Knoble, MD, a medical oncologist with Zangmeister. "With AON, we haven't lost our autonomy and are free to practice what we consider to be the best medicine for our patients."

The effects of the partnership were immediate. Zangmeister was able to provide patients with access to financial assistance counselors and charitable foundations, like the American Oncology Cares Foundation, to help pay for treatments and essential non-medical expenses. Other resources, such as access to the care coordination team and the clinic's CPAN chapter for patient advocacy, were also available for the first time.

Working with AON's pharmacy and leveraging the network's ability to negotiate with larger payers helped increase Zangmeister's fill rate to between 75% and



80%. In addition to making patients' lives a bit easier, the higher volume added to the clinic's bottom line and also allowed it to purchase medications at lower prices and with better payment terms.

"Before AON, all pharmacy revenue was walking out the door and causing a lot of headaches for us on the clinical side," Pfaff said. "So that's been a huge, huge help for us."

Partnering with AON also gave Zangmeister access to a more robust revenue cycle department, leading to increased revenue by reducing claim denials and expediting the revenue cycle.

### An Advantageous Practice Model

Partnering with AON allowed Zangmeister to keep treating patients throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to ensuring the clinic's physicians and employees had enough personal protection equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies, AON was able to have telehealth up and running inside the clinic in just one weekend — making Zangmeister the city's first oncology practice to use the service regularly during the pandemic.

"As an administrator, I didn't have to investigate programs or go through contracting with a vendor. AON did all that for us," said Pfaff.

AON's billing department also worked with Zangmeister on appropriate reimbursement for telehealth visits while the IT and operations teams educated the clinical staff on how to use the equipment and the scheduling staff on setting and cancelling appointments. As a result, Zangmeister was able to cut its in-person office visits in half by performing more than 2,200 appointments via



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**Jeanna Knoble, MD**  
Zangmeister Cancer Center



telehealth, helping prevent the spread of COVID-19 to patients and staff while allowing physicians to continue administering care.

“We were able to determine which patients needed to come into the clinic and which didn’t. For instance, patients receiving chemotherapy or someone having side effects or in need of lab work could come in, while those who had follow-up appointments or just had questions could be seen via telehealth,” said Pfaff. “We couldn’t have done any of that as timely as we did without AON.”

Because it was able to operate throughout the pandemic, Zangmeister maintained its patient volume and did not have to furlough or reduce staff. This, in turn, helped the clinic continue to provide top-quality care to its patients.

“While visiting a big hospital system, we were told that we were way ahead of the curve on this,” said Dr. Knoble. “It was really as smooth of a transition as possible in getting patients seen and cared for. That was a huge thing.”

## Expanding Its Footprint

Zangmeister leveraged its partnership with AON to expand its presence in the Columbus area to include clinics in Grove City and Westerville. By reaching out to patients who don’t have an oncologist nearby, Zangmeister is reinforcing what makes community oncology so special: Providing people with high-quality care right in their own backyard.

Zangmeister’s physicians and employees have been so pleased with the AON partnership that they would like to get other practices on board who are struggling but concerned about maintaining their independence.

“We’ve seen a great benefit for our group, and we’d like to get other practices on board,” said Pfaff.

Additionally, the clinic has become a strategic research site for Sarah Cannon Research Institute,



## The AON Difference

Partnering with AON allowed Zangmeister to stay open and ahead of the curve throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic

<b>Telehealth</b>	More than 2,200 virtual appointments
<b>Supplies</b>	Enough PPE & cleaning equipment
<b>Operations</b>	Training on proper procedures
<b>Staff Retention</b>	No reduction or furlough of employees

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[AONcology.com](https://aoncology.com)



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**Christine Pfaff, RPh**  
Zangmeister Cancer Center



launched its CPAN chapter for patient advocacy and now offers patients access to the AON Cares Foundation for essential non-medical expenses.



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