Patient Benefits from Multidisciplinary Approach to Treating Cancers

Prerak Shah, MD, Otolaryngologist, addresses the team of cancer care specialists at a weekly multidisciplinary cancer conference where experts determine the most appropriate custom treatment strategy for a patient.

Commission on Cancer®

For six consecutive years, Holy Family Hospital's Cancer Center has held the Outstanding Achievement Award from the American College of Surgeons (ACoS) Commission on Cancer (CoC) - one of only nine hospitals in Massachusetts, and one of only three north of Boston, to garner this level of commendation.

UMassMemorial Health Care

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UMass Memorial Health Care and Holy Family Hospital Collaborate for Radiation Oncology

Karen had no history of thyroid cancer in her family so when she felt a palpable nodule in the right side of her neck she didn't consider that it could be cancerous. She did, however, know enough to schedule an appointment with her primary care physician to evaluate the lump. She had an ultrasound and was referred to Prerak Shah, MD and Robert Cipro, MD, Otolaryngologists from New England Ear, Nose and Throat Center, who practice at Holy Family Hospital.

She had her right thyroid lobe surgically removed at Holy Family Hospital using specialized nerve monitoring devices to minimize the risk of injury to the nerve that goes to the vocal cords and produces voice. Her surgery revealed that the nodule and two smaller ones on the right side were cancerous.

"I think it is important to reassure patients that the likelihood that any given thyroid nodule is malignant is rather small," explained Dr. Shah. "However if a thyroid cancer is identified, this is invariably a very curable condition with a great prognosis. The multidisciplinary approach and the state-of-the-art technology we have for our thyroid patients rivals that of any tertiary care center in Boston."

"You have to put your faith in somebody," said Karen. "Too often people run to Boston for their care instead of staying in the community. I just don't think you have to do that. There are enough clinical experts in our own community that you can stay here, close to home, and access the quality care you need." – Karen

Similar to many other patients, Karen did not consider herself at risk for thyroid cancer. She quickly shifted her focus when she learned of her diagnosis. "I have three grandchildren, a daughter, my husband and I take care of my father," she explained. Karen stayed focused and chose to stay local for her care. "Until I was diagnosed, I didn't realize how prevalent the disease is, especially in women. I was taken aback by how many people I know who are personally affected or know of someone with this disease," she shared.

Last year, over 75,000 head and neck cancers were diagnosed in the United States. While most head and neck cancers are twice as common in males, thyroid cancer has a three-fold increase in occurrence among females.

Receiving a cancer diagnosis is a life-changing experience. Holy Family's Cancer Care team understands that each patient and their family have a lot to consider in a short period of time. We want our patients to focus on their health and be able to turn to one place for the care they need.

For Karen, this meant she had access to a multi-disciplinary team of experts including her otolaryngologist -- radiation oncologists, medical oncologists, radiologists, pathologists, speech pathologists, nutritionists, radiation technologists and nurses.

Every Wednesday, the team of cancer care specialists gathers at a multidisciplinary cancer conference. Here, these experts review all of the diagnostic and imaging studies to help determine the most appropriate custom treatment strategy for a patient. The majority of Holy Family's cancer patients are presented at this weekly conference.

Karen's case was discussed and her care plan was defined. Six weeks after the first surgery, Dr. Shah and Dr. Cipro operated on her left side to completely remove all of her remaining thyroid gland. It tested cancer free. Six months later, she underwent radiation therapy in the form of a pill. Dr. Chun, who specializes in this radioiodine therapy, helped Karen through this portion of treatment, which required that she spend eight days separated from everyone.

Karen felt very comfortable knowing that both of her surgeons and their associates, Drs. Postal, Selig, Thatcher, Vasanth and Scannell, are all board-certified Otolaryngologists who have trained at reputable training institutions and hold academic affiliations with the leading Boston academic centers.

"So many people have things that are worse," explained Karen. "I knew I could get through this, for my family. It's amazing what people will do for you in a time of need. And I can't even see my scars… that's amazing!"

"You have to put your faith in somebody," she said. "Everyone, every step of the way, was phenomenal. Too often people run to Boston for their care instead of staying in the community. I just don't think you have to do that. There are enough clinical experts in our own community that you can stay here, close to home, and access the quality care you need. I wouldn't have gone anywhere else, for anything."

"My life is enriched with the grace and courage of my patients whom I am deeply privileged to work with every day. They allow me to learn from them during the most difficult time of their lives."

– Han-Ting Lin, MD,
Chief of Medical Oncology.

For more information on Holy Family Hospital's Cancer Center, visit steward.org/cancercare.

Holy Family Hospital's Cancer Center Provides Access to State-of-the-Art Technology and Treatment

Our sophisticated treatment offerings allow for fewer side effects and shorter treatment times while sparing normal tissue and organs around the tumor.

HEAD & NECK CANCERS

Laser-assisted Surgical Therapy – Laser therapy has been an integral tool to the treatment of soft tissue head and neck cancers for over 40 years. Combining precision and accessibility is a direct advantage of using laser therapy during endoscopic procedures for the larynx and base of tongue.

Nerve Monitoring – Preservation of certain nerves not involved with cancer is a high priority to improve post-operative functional abilities for head and neck cancer patients. Its greatest utility is with the recurrent laryngeal nerve in thyroid cancer surgery to prevent vocal cord dysfunction and hoarseness and with the facial nerve in parotid gland cancer surgery to help prevent facial paralysis post-operatively.

Harmonic Scalpel – The head and neck region is one of the most complex anatomic areas of the human body with a robust blood supply to each region. Harmonic scalpel has been utilized to help divide small- to medium-sized blood vessels during surgery minimizing risk of post-operative bleeding and increasing efficiency by reducing total operative time.

BRAIN CANCER

Stereotactic Radiosurgery, a one-day minimally invasive procedure that treats brain disorders with the precise delivery of a single, high dose of radiation.

Stereotactic Radiation Therapy, a non-invasive technology for complex cancer cases. The only Varian Trilogy™ 2100EX linear accelerator brings robotic arm and on-board imaging north of Boston for the first time.

LUNG CANCER

Video-Assisted Thoroscopic Surgery (VATS) and Minimally Invasive Thoracic Surgery (MITS) are two advanced lung cancer treatments that reduce the risk of complications while allowing for a faster recovery, quicker return home and less pain.

Electromagnetic Navigation Bronchoscopy (ENB) is a sophisticated technology that allows physicians to locate and biopsy small lesions within the lung. This minimizes the need for more invasive surgical procedures and allows surgeons to detect lung disease and lung cancer earlier, even before symptoms are evident. Offers a low-risk treatment option for patients who cannot undergo surgery.

Endobronchial Ultrasound (EBUS) is a minimally invasive procedure that replaces conventional surgery and doesn't require any incisions to diagnose and stage lung cancer, detect infections and identify inflammatory diseases that affect the lungs.

PROSTATE CANCER

Prostate Seed Implants, a one-day early prostate cancer treatment that provides the same results as surgery with minimal side effects.