

Expanded Cancer Care Services

After having some seemingly non-threatening symptoms like bloating, cramping, and feeling full, 44-year-old Daniell Miller went to her primary care physician and was scanned and tested for what seemed to be a bowel obstruction. When the results came in, however, her doctor had to break the news that would change her life. She had ovarian cancer.

“After I was diagnosed with cancer, everything moved so quickly,” said Daniell. “The nurse navigator was great – she walked me through the steps of how to tell the whole family that I had been diagnosed with cancer, which made it so much easier to handle. The nurse navigator is amazing; my oncologist, Dr. Lutman is amazing. I knew I was in good hands. I don’t know what I would do without all of the people who have helped me through this difficult time,” said Daniell.

One special person has been there for Daniell since the very beginning. She refers to Katherine Guthrie, Director of Oncology, as her “guardian angel.” Katherine has gone above and beyond to ensure Daniell feels supported and loved through her experience, as she does for all of her patients. “When I was in the ICU, one morning I woke up to Katherine holding my hand. My family was at church and couldn’t be there with me, and she didn’t want me to be alone. She is filled with so much compassion and love, and I have a friend for life in her,” said Daniell.

As the Director of Oncology for the Central Coast Service Area within Dignity Health, Katherine serves as a vital link between local cancer patients and care providers. With over three decades of experience in cancer care, Katherine is a knowledgeable advocate for cancer patients as she trains her team, organizes, and develops the cancer care program on the Central Coast. She shares this dedication with an excellent team of care providers, who are working to expand cancer care services on the Central Coast.

“I have a true commitment and am passionate about quality cancer care. Everyone you know has been touched by cancer, as I have been several times, so my work in our community is heartfelt,” said Katherine. “I try to make cancer patients and their loved ones feel safe and loved, and I work on this every day of the week with my team, patients, and myself.”

Bill and Louise Racine, longtime residents of Grover Beach, had a similar experience to Daniell’s with support from the cancer care team when Louise was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

“The Monday after Thanksgiving, we received a phone call from Louise’s primary care doctor,” said Bill. “She had been having trouble keeping food down, and they told us that it was pancreatic cancer.” While Bill and Louise were shaken by the diagnosis, they were comforted by the quick action taken by their healthcare team. “A CT scan was ordered for Wednesday. They made arrangements to get her admitted that night, and they set up a double bypass surgery that Saturday.”

Throughout the long hours of doctors’ appointments and treatments, Bill stood by Louise’s side for support. “I asked our oncologist the percentage of people that survive pancreatic cancer – he said it was less than ten percent. I’m happy to say that about a month ago my wife had a follow-up pet scan, and it

revealed no cancer. It's a miracle," said Bill. "We are so lucky and blessed to have had the surgical team, the oncology team, and everyone who took care of us at the hospital. We are so blessed to be living in this community."

One significant resource in place for local cancer patients is the Cancer Support Group. This group, facilitated by Thomas Steffora, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Carol Lowe, Nurse Navigator, meets twice a month at the Coastal Cancer Care Center and offers information and emotional support to cancer patients and their families. Attendees find ways to cope with their loved ones and make short, mid, and long-term goals to clarify exactly what they will need to do to move forward. "I've been humbled by the variety and depth of peoples' experiences," said Thomas. "There have been so many heartfelt relationships that were formed not from grief or sadness, but a shared ability to lift one another up." This resource is made possible by donations to the Foundation's Cancer Care Fund, which also provides local cancer patients with diagnostic screenings, counseling, and financial support for everyday expenses when needed.

Arroyo Grande Community Hospital will soon expand the cancer care program on the Central Coast by offering cancer services in the new Matthew Will Memorial Medical Center on the hospital campus. With a cancer care team including oncologists, a nurse navigator, dietitian, social worker and pharmacist, these services will be offered in a space completely dedicated to cancer treatment, recovery, and education.

"I look forward to having an expanded oncology program in the Five Cities area. Treatment and recovery is a long process, and it's so important to have family and friends nearby," said Bill.

Daniell, whose family travels out of the area several times each week to support her as she receives treatment, agrees. She added, "I feel it is vital to have community support to expand our cancer program at Arroyo Grande Community Hospital. It's so important to have this program so we can help other patients through this horrible time in their lives."

If you would like to support cancer care services at Arroyo Grande Community Hospital, you can visit SupportArroyoGrande.org or call the Foundation at 805.994.5421.

|
|