

When the surgeon informed me that my biopsy report showed ‘it’s cancer’ and that he would like to see me in his office to discuss the treatment plan, my first questions to him were “How long will this take? Will I be able to work?” After all, I had a business to run and a house and people to care for. I just didn’t have time to have cancer.

I met with him, and the news was worse than I had anticipated. The diagnosis was inflammatory breast cancer, Stage III. I had never heard of inflammatory breast cancer but soon learned the words connected with it were “aggressive” and “lethal.” The five-year survival rate was 20%. I knew then that at age 64 all my grand plans were on hold (maybe even cancelled). I felt rather like I had somehow been transported to a different world. The surgeon gently but professionally outlined the treatment (chemotherapy, then surgery, then radiation) and said, “You are now in the hands of the oncologist.”

On my first consultation with Dr. George Saman of Virginia Oncology, I knew that I was in very capable hands indeed. Cancer, oncology, chemotherapy are words we dread – things that happen to other people, not us, not me. I found Dr. Saman to be a skilled and dedicated scientist, who inspired confidence in his patients. This confidence in medical professionals gave me personal confidence that I could do what I needed to do. At the same time, Dr. Saman was interested in and responsive to how I, Pat Eure, and my husband were responding to the illness. I told him I did well with information. He respected that, taking the time to answer questions. Actually, I had few questions because his own comments at each visit were pretty inclusive.

As a cancer patient, I learned that one of the most important people in my treatment was the oncology nurse. I was fortunate that my four and a half months of chemo as well as over six months of weekly Herceptin infusions were administered by a special woman named Donna Mason. I think I can best describe her in what I said to Dr. Saman – “I get the feeling she must have had cancer herself because of how she understands each of our thoughts and needs.” Indeed it was difficult to feel anxious in Donna’s treatment room. We knew that she would always be there when we were treated, that she could find any vein, and that she was quietly but constantly and carefully keeping a close eye on each of us.

My husband and I live on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, which is an hour and a half from the nearest Virginia Oncology facility. Over the months of treatment and the continuing followup, we have learned how much it meant to us that an oncologist like Dr. Saman travels to our area once a week. We are assured that, even though I have a rare form of cancer, we have access to the finest medical care.

Pat Eure