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Double mastectomy eases sports writer's cancer worry

It was a lump that wasn't there two weeks before. Knoxville sports writer Maria Cornelius was stunned when she felt a knot in her right breast one Sunday in December.

"The lump definitely wasn't there two weeks earlier when I had a checkup with my physician," she remembers. "I was shocked."

Cornelius, who because of a family history of cancer had always been vigilant about performing regular self-breast exam, immediately made an appointment to have the lump evaluated. A mammogram showed abnormal results. Then, a needle biopsy revealed that the spot in her breast was, indeed, cancerous.

"Within two weeks my life completely changed," says Cornelius.

Her physician referred her to Dr. Lytle Brown of Premier Surgical Associates at Parkwest Medical Center. Dr. Brown has performed breast cancer surgeries for more than 20 years.

"I did a lot of research and it was important to me to have an experienced surgeon," explains Cornelius. "Research shows that your chance of recurrence



Sports writer Maria Cornelius credits early detection as the key in her battle against breast cancer. She was quickly back on the sidelines interviewing athletes following her double mastectomy.

decreases tremendously with a more experienced surgeon."

Dr. Brown carefully explained her surgical options. "He was very thorough and wrote everything out and even drew diagrams," says Cornelius.

She chose to undergo a double mastectomy, removal of both breasts. "For me, it was the fear factor that I would be constantly

checking the other breast for cancer," she says. "Once I chose to eliminate that daily worry, I never wavered in my decision."

Cornelius' surgery was successfully performed in February. She admits that getting used to her post-surgery body has been an adjustment.

"At my age of 50, I opted not to do reconstruction," she says. "It is different. The first time you see yourself in the mirror, you see the scars and an odd-looking chest. Other cancer survivors had warned me: be prepared for that first moment."

Cornelius, who has healed and is back at work, has advice for other women facing a breast cancer diagnosis.

"Take time to grieve and be angry, and do whatever you need to do. But, then, you've got to get up and keep going." She says seek help and support before and after your diagnosis.

"Don't go through this alone.

Let others help you," she advises. "Reach out to people and you'll be amazed at how many fellow breast cancer survivors there are."

And, Cornelius stresses the importance of regular breast

self-exams. "I'm the poster child for early detection," she smiles.

"Don't ignore changes in your health like weight loss or pain. Don't wait. If I had ignored it, this tumor would've just grown and grown."

For more information or physician referral, visit www.TreatedWell.com or call 865-374-PARK.

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— Maria Cornelius, breast cancer survivor

Partial vs. full mastectomy? Personal preference is key consideration

Approximately 75 percent of patients diagnosed with early stage breast cancer are candidates for either mastectomy or breast-conserving surgery (also called a partial mastectomy or lumpectomy). Mastectomy is the removal of the entire breast, while breast-conserving surgery removes the cancerous tumor and part of the surrounding breast tissue. Breast-conserving surgery is usually followed by radiation therapy.

Studies have long shown that a patient's survival outcome is similar whether you undergo a full or partial mastectomy. That's why it's important to include your personal well-being, lifestyle and overall health when weighing your personal surgical treatment options for breast cancer.

"The size and location of the tumor and the patient's family history are always factors to consider," explains Dr. Lytle Brown of Premier Surgical Associates at Parkwest Medical Center. "But personal preference drives a lot of the surgery decision. At the end of the day, it's what you are going to be most comfortable with."



Surgeon Lytle Brown IV, MD, FACS

Dr. Brown says many patients who don't wish to go through weeks of radiation and repeated follow-up scans, may opt for full mastectomy. And some women, especially those with a family history or high genetic risk like actress Angelina Jolie, may even decide to proactively have both breasts removed.

"Some patients choose a bilateral mastectomy because they don't want to have that constant worry that cancer will develop in the other breast. They're scared to death every time they get a physical exam," explains Dr. Brown. "They want to eliminate that fear on the front end."

Dr. Brown says younger women with an early stage tumor, often opt for a partial mastectomy. "Some are thrilled that they don't have to have their whole breast removed."

And techniques for breast reconstruction have never been better. Breast implants are more safe and comfortable. Or new breasts may be constructed by using fat from the patient's stomach, back, buttock or thigh.

Dr. Brown advises every patient to talk openly with her surgeon to determine which option will best suit her individual health, lifestyle and personal preference.

And, it's critical that women be proactive about their breast health by performing regular self-exams and quickly seeking medical attention for any suspicious lumps.

"The bottom line is: breast cancer is all about stage," states Dr. Brown. "Women who are diagnosed in an early stage do much better. The best thing is early detection."

For more information or physician referral, visit www.TreatedWell.com or call 865-374-PARK.

How much do YOU know about breast cancer?

Test your breast cancer knowledge of breast cancer by taking this quiz. Check your answers at www.TreatedWell.com.

- Early detection of breast cancer is the key to successful treatment.
A. True B. False
- Older women are more likely to develop breast cancer.
A. True B. False
- More than half of breast lumps are cancerous.
A. True B. False
- It's OK to use deodorant on the day you have a mammogram.
A. True B. False
- The best time to examine your breasts is two weeks after your period starts.
A. True B. False
- Smoking may increase your risk for breast cancer.
A. True B. False
- Breast cancer is often treated by surgery, radiation and chemotherapy.
A. True B. False
- Starting at age 30, women should have a mammogram every one or two years.
A. True B. False
- A woman's chances of developing breast cancer are higher if her mother, a sister or daughter had it.
A. True B. False
- Breast cancer is the leading cause of death in women ages 35 to 54.
A. True B. False

Mammograms are a Girl's Breast Friend

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