

Clinical UpdateCompliments of
John Muir Health

Physician News

SERVICE LINE SPOTLIGHT:

Breast Health Services at John Muir Health

John Muir Health's Breast Health Services has long prided itself on its advanced, multidisciplinary approach to breast cancer, as well as a very personalized focus on each patient.

The multidisciplinary Breast Health team consists of specialized experts who provide comprehensive care along the spectrum from advanced screening (including 3-D screening technology in our Walnut Creek and Brentwood locations, with Orinda coming in November) to leading-edge cancer treatment. It includes breast surgeons, plastic surgeons, medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, pathologists, radiologists and genetic counselors who collaborate on a tumor board which considers each patient's case to optimize individual treatment plans.

John Muir Health is accredited by the American College of Surgeons/Commission on Cancer as a Nationally Accredited Program of Breast Centers (NAPBC). In addition, our Imaging Services are recognized as Breast Imaging Centers of Excellence through the American College of Radiology.

Brenda Carlson, Executive Director, Oncology and Specialty Services, says that "As breast cancer screening and detection technology, and its treatment options, continue to evolve, I am so proud that John Muir Health has been able to evolve in parallel, in our expertise and in our technology. We are constantly moving from great to greater, with the ability to adopt the newest and best ways to optimize treatment. We see the value of this every day with the patients we treat."

This month, we talked with Linda Womack, Executive Director, Imaging Services, and Vicki Rocconi, RN, Nurse Navigator for Breast Health Services to get their perspectives on their department.

JMHPN: What are the most recent developments in your department?

Linda Womack: The latest development is using 3-D technology (Digital Breast Tomosynthesis) for mammography in breast biopsies. This has allowed us to better visualize the tissue we need to biopsy, especially if the area of concern was found on a 3-D mammogram.

Vicki Rocconi, RN: There is a lot of information out lately about dense breast tissue and how this may affect a woman's risk of breast cancer, and even the nature of the cancer. We are investigating how we can most accurately determine density, and provide patients and their physicians with objective information to help understand their risk and to identify patients who may need additional imaging studies.

Of what are you most proud?

Linda Womack: I'm most proud of my team. I work with an amazing group of women who really care about the patients, and care about the work that they do every day.

Vicki Rocconi: I am proud of my patients. I am always inspired by women who are making informed decisions during what is likely one of the most stressful times in their lives. I am also very proud to work for a health system that values advanced technology, quality care and provides support for patients as they go through a breast cancer experience and beyond.

What do you wish our MDs and clinicians knew about your department?

Linda Womack: I hope they know that our Breast Health Services are now located together in Walnut Creek, and we are really getting into a groove in terms of offering the complete patient experience. Before, patients were scanned at one location and then had to go to other areas.

Vicki Rocconi: I wish they all knew how a Nurse Navigator can assist them and their patients through diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

Nurse Navigators are oncology nurses with expertise in specific cancers. When women are newly diagnosed, they see multiple doctors and have to make major decisions that will impact them for the rest of their lives, at a time when they are usually very distressed. A nurse navigator can assess their needs and provide them with information to make informed decisions, assure them that their care is consistent with national guidelines, schedule their case for review at a tumor board, reassure them regarding their physician's expertise, refer them to resources, help them develop questions for their physicians and follow them throughout their cancer experience. A Nurse Navigator is that one consistent support person throughout a patient's cancer experience and into survivorship.

What will be most challenging in the future?

Linda Womack: It will be challenging to secure funding for 3-D technology at other sites. A lot of women are asking to be screened on a 3-D machine, which we do not offer at Concord or other outpatient locations, such as 1450 Treat and San Ramon/Bishop Ranch. They may contact their insurance to see if it is covered. The equipment is expensive! Also, I really want to have the ability, in terms of our services and staff, to perform same-day biopsies on patients scheduled for a known lump or issue. This will expedite the agonizing suspenseful time a woman has waiting for results.

Vicki Rocconi: Nurse Navigation is available to all our patients, but not all access it. Now that most imaging is performed in one area, the Navigator for Breast Health Services is closer to patients and use of services has increased. In my opinion, all patients could benefit from navigation, but it would be a huge challenge to see every patient.

What are the biggest satisfactions in your work?

Linda Womack: Besides my wonderful staff? Probably when I get those letters or calls from patients like Julie Long (see Julie's Story) who tell me how thankful they are for our staff, our physicians and our technology.

Vicki Rocconi: Assisting patients through a difficult time in their lives is very satisfying. It is also rewarding when they are through with treatment but still call or visit and you see them return to what they were doing before, or making changes to improve their situations.

Do you have any patient stories you'd like to share?

Linda Womack: At least once a week, we hear that we probably would have not found a breast cancer without the 3-D technology...like Julie's cancer. (See next page.)

Julie's Story



East Bay Realtor Julie Long went in for her routine annual mammogram in San Ramon in 2015. She was told by her technician that due to her family history of breast cancer, and dense breast tissue, she might benefit from new technology offered at John Muir Health -- a 3-D mammogram. The tech handed her a brochure, and explained that the benefits included a 29 percent increase in detection of all breast cancers, and an advantage in screening dense tissue.

Julie rescheduled immediately. After her 3-D imaging appointment, she got a very important call: a mass had indeed been found.

After a full workup, and review by the Multidisciplinary Tumor Board, Julie had a bilateral mastectomy. She underwent lengthy treatment in the hyperbaric unit to aid

her body's healing process, and also had chemotherapy, reconstructive surgery, and continuing follow-up care.

Julie was recently profiled in a patient testimonial video, in which she shared heartfelt comments about her outstanding care at John Muir Health. Here are some of her quotes:

"At John Muir, there is a culture of patient first. From day one, I felt like I was getting very specific care for my situation, plus...a look at what my own personal desires were to make my own decision. The access to everybody has been spectacular."

"Looking back, I have never had a more heartwarming, more meaningful experience - the feel of being loved and supported. And that's all within the whole John Muir network, no matter where I've been."

See Julie's video on the website at:

<https://www.johnmuirhealth.com/services/cancer-services/whatwe-treat/breast-cancer-services.html#!prettyPhoto>

