

13 YEARS AND COUNTING

PATRICIA OCKULY IS STILL CANCER-FREE,
THANKS TO MARYMOUNT HOSPITAL

It all started with a good laugh.

Patricia Ockuly, a wife and mother of two, had gone for her annual gynecologic visit at Marymount Hospital. One nurse practitioner playfully teased the 38-year-old that she was getting perilously close to the “Big 4-0,” the age the American Cancer Society recommends beginning annual mammograms.

Mrs. Ockuly had never had breast issues. She’d never had a breast lump. No one in her family had ever had breast cancer. But one close relative did have breast cysts—all benign.

So, Mrs. Ockuly and the nurse laughed that 38 was the new 40. Why wait two more years to have a mammogram? Why not go now, just to be safe?

It was January 1999, and Mrs. Ockuly was on her way to her first mammogram. But it turned out to be no laughing matter.

SEEING AN AREA OF CONCERN

“The radiologist found it right away,” says Mrs. Ockuly. “The image of my right breast showed a small area of calcification that needed to be checked out.”

That triggered more tests for her and an eventual diagnosis of breast cancer.

“You hear the word ‘cancer,’ and you immediately think the worst,” she says. “In my mind, having cancer meant dying. But after the initial shock, I couldn’t let myself stay negative. My daughters were ages 2 and 3. I had to focus on them. Regardless of what was happening to me, I was still Mom.”

DECIDING ON TREATMENT

A team of Marymount specialists, including a general surgeon, plastic surgeon and oncologist, helped Mrs. Ockuly compare treatment options.

“At my young age, I just wanted it out,” she says.

That’s why she opted to have a mastectomy, a surgery to remove her breast so cancer could never recur there. In addition, she had an implant inserted where her right breast had been and her left breast was reconstructed to match.

“Through it all, Debbie [Mannella, Mammography Coordinator at Marymount Hospital] and the gals in mammography supported me,” says Mrs. Ockuly. “I had scarring after my breast surgeries that laser treatments couldn’t remove. One of the mammogram ladies recommended I ask my doctor about radiation therapy to minimize the scars. It worked, and I’m so grateful to her.”

THE COMFORT OF A TRUSTED TEAM

Mrs. Ockuly reunites with some of the same mammography professionals each January at her annual screening (for her left breast).

“I have the choice of going to other places for a mammogram, but I choose Marymount *every* time,” she says. “They’re like my family. I show them pictures of my daughters, now teenagers.”

Because of her past diagnosis, Mrs. Ockuly receives the results of her mammograms before she leaves. For 13 years, it’s been nothing but good news.

“Every year that I learn I’m still clean, it’s great to share my initial joy with the people who were there the first time, when I was diagnosed,” she says.

Ms. Mannella says she is glad to be one of them. “Tricia is living proof that breast cancer doesn’t have to mean a death sentence—especially if you have regular breast exams and mammograms and catch any abnormalities early.”

DON'T WAIT—SCHEDULE A MAMMOGRAM TODAY

First, talk to your doctor about getting a physician’s order for a mammogram (it’s required). Then, **call 216.636.8200** to schedule your mammogram at Euclid, Hillcrest, Marymount or South Pointe hospitals. To have a mammogram at a family health center, call the facility directly (see back cover).





Faster, Clearer Mammograms at Marymount

Today, mammograms at Marymount are even better than they were when Mrs. Ockuly was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1999. Marymount now provides digital mammograms, which make breast screenings faster, easier and clearer than ever.

Traditionally, having a mammogram meant getting four X-ray images, two per breast, on film. A technologist would run the film through a processor and then hang the processed films on a view box for a radiologist to read. Now, with digital mammograms, the process is more like using a digital camera. There's no film to process or negatives to handle. The images are stored and viewed on a computer.

"Women still need to have the four X-rays—and the compression and positioning are the same—but processing the results is much faster," says Debbie Mannella, Mammography Coordinator at Marymount Hospital. "Instead of 15 to 20 minutes, women finish their digital mammograms in about five to 10 minutes."

And the results are easier to diagnose. Radiologists can magnify, sharpen, change contrast and otherwise adjust digital images to see breast tissue more clearly. That's good for all women, but especially for those under 50. Younger women tend to have denser breast tissue in which cancer is more difficult to detect.