

MESSAGE *of* HOPE

MultiCare 
Rockwood Clinic

BetterConnected

MultiCare Rockwood Clinic fights breast cancer with an integrated multidisciplinary approach.

There's much to process and absorb during an initial consultation with a breast cancer surgeon. But if a new patient only hears one thing, Dr. Heidi Richardson wants it to be "hope."

"There's great hope and survivability in breast cancer, especially when it's diagnosed early," says Richardson, a fellowship-trained surgeon specializing exclusively in breast cancer care.

At MultiCare Rockwood Clinic, patients don't have to wait long for reassurance. A multidisciplinary team of specialists at the Breast Health Center offers consultations to new cancer patients within 24 hours of a referral and work together to develop customized treatment plans. Patients meet with the surgeon, the medical oncologist, and the radiation oncologist, getting all their questions answered on the same day and in the same place. Patients also learn they will be joined on their treatment journey by a nurse navigator who will walk with them every step of the way.

"We have everything special here," says Richardson, who has been a member of the Rockwood



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community for nine years. "We offer patients integrated, personalized care."

Art and Science

The promise of hope is part of what drew Richardson to the specialty of breast cancer surgery.

"It's the impact that breast cancer surgery has on cancer," she says. "Surgery itself significantly impacts the survival rate of breast cancer patients."

She uses an oncoplastic approach, an approach that combines state-of-the-art oncological surgery with the latest plastic surgery techniques. Her goal is to effectively remove the cancer while cosmetically preserving the appearance of the breast and setting the stage for successful reconstruction.

"It can be as simple as choosing an incision that will heal nicely, or it can be drawing in adjacent breast tissue and using some local flaps to fill in an area," Richardson explains. "It's all about cosmesis—the preserving of the shape of the breast—while performing good oncological surgery with good margins."

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EARLY DETECTION

While there's been a move recently in the medical community toward less-frequent mammograms, Dr. Heidi Richardson is still a proponent of annual screening mammograms for women 40 and older and especially for women in high-risk groups, regardless of age.

"We know that it's going to catch breast cancer early," says Richardson, a breast cancer surgeon. "One in eight of us are going to get breast cancer, and most women who are diagnosed have no family history at all."

Fortunately, state-of-the-art screening is available and convenient for women in the region. The newest 3-D mammography technology is more effective than ever at detecting changes in the breast. It produces detailed images that more accurately sort out the significant findings and prevent unnecessary biopsies.

Comprehensive breast health services, including best-in-class imaging performed by fellowship-trained specialists, are available at MultiCare Rockwood Clinic locations in North Spokane, Spokane Valley, and Downtown.

In July 2017, Rockwood Clinic officially became part of the MultiCare Health System, strengthening the network and expanding coverage to patients in the Pacific and Inland Northwest.

Message of Hope

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More complex cases may involve surgery performed with both Richardson and a plastic surgeon present.

While Richardson relishes the technical aspects of breast cancer surgery, she also draws inspiration from the relationships this particular specialty affords her. Other surgical practices are focused on acute conditions, such as appendicitis, but Richardson follows her cancer patients for five years.

"I enjoy not only the surgery but also counseling women with a new diagnosis and bringing them through the whole process," she says. "When ladies come in and have that feeling of 'Oh my gosh, I've been diagnosed with breast cancer,' I can give them hope."

Valerie's Story

The message of hope is received every day by patients like Valerie Stichweh, who was diagnosed with aggressive and fast-growing Stage 3 breast cancer in December 2014.

"It was so unexpected," Stichweh recalls. "I was 39 years old. You don't even usually get a mammogram until you're 40."

Richardson says younger patients have an entirely different set of issues. She notes that younger patients may have reproductive concerns or, like Stichweh, have a young child at home. Rockwood Clinic's multidisciplinary team includes nurses and social workers who can help younger patients manage their unique cancer treatment challenges.

Stichweh's comprehensive treatment plan, for example, included a double mastectomy, more than a year of chemotherapy, and 33 radiation treatments. It was a long road, Stichweh says, but this year she and her supportive family are celebrating two years of her being cancer-free.

"I'm just grateful to my team of doctors. They came up with a specific plan for me, and I believe it saved my life," Stichweh says. "They are not only extremely intelligent and gifted, but they are wonderful human beings."

Now, she says, she's able to enjoy the simple things in life, like taking her daughter to her first school dance, or going on a date with her husband, or enjoying a girls' lunch with her friends.

"What I would tell people going through this journey is, don't give up. There is hope. In the trials of life, in the trenches, in the places that you think are never going to end, there is hope. I had cancer, and now I'm in remission."

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