hometown health™
FRANCISCAN HEALTHCARE

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Breast cancer patient: Cancer Center staff “are my angels”

On Jan. 4, 2013, Brenda Braatz stepped on a roller coaster and didn’t get off for five years.

At least that’s how it felt to Braatz — then 49 — when she was diagnosed with ER-positive, HER2-negative breast cancer that had spread to her lymph nodes and breast skin.

“It was overwhelming,” the Sparta resident says.

Fortunately, she wasn’t alone on her journey. Her husband, Mark, was beside her, of course. But there was another group supporting her every step of the way: the doctors, nurses and other care providers at the Cancer Center at Mayo Clinic Health System — Franciscan Healthcare in La Crosse. “They were my strength,” she says. “They became like family.”

First, Braatz met with Paula Gill, M.D., a hematologist/oncologist, to outline a treatment plan that began with chemotherapy. When that failed to shrink the tumor in Braatz’s left breast, Kathleen Christian, M.D., a general surgeon, performed a mastectomy. Afterward, Matthew Sherrill, M.D., a plastic and reconstructive surgeon, entered the operating room to place a temporary expander under Braatz’s skin to make space for the silicone implant that would eventually replace her breast tissue.

When Braatz healed from surgery, she began another round of chemotherapy. When that treatment was finished, she started seven weeks of daily radiation. “Radiation was taxing for me,” Braatz says. “It wore me out.”

During those difficult days, Braatz says she drew strength from staff in the Cancer Center. “When I would see them, I felt rejuvenation and hope,” she says.

“I felt like they were protecting me and giving me life. They made me feel I could do treatment just one more time.”

While Braatz was receiving treatment, her older sister was also diagnosed with breast cancer. That prompted Braatz to undergo genetic testing at Mayo Clinic in Rochester. Results showed she had the CHEK2 mutation, which put her at higher risk of developing breast cancer again.

Based on those results, she decided to have a second mastectomy, followed by 3-D nipple and areola tattooing.

La Crosse. “They were my strength,” she says. “They became like family.”

“I’m very glad I did it and would recommend tattooing to any breast cancer survivor who wants to get their body back,” Braatz says. “I will always have scars, but they’re not the first thing I see any more when I look in the mirror.”

Five years after her diagnosis, Braatz’s journey continues. She still has treatments ahead of her, and lives with side effects from treatment.

But that’s not what Braatz focuses on; instead, she focuses on celebrating life. She retired earlier this year, and soon afterward she and Mark embarked on an extended vacation that includes visits to family and national parks.

Before she left home, Braatz stopped by the Cancer Center to drop off a handmade card thanking the staff for their care. It’s something she’d worked on for months. “I scribbled things down on a note pad every time I thought of something I wanted to say,” Braatz says. “But you can’t fit it all into words. They gave me so many things: strength, love, courage. I would have never made it through without those people. They’re my angels.”

If you notice a lump or any other breast changes, contact the Center for Breast Care in La Crosse at 608-392-9822.
Each year, around 14 million people in the United States are infected with human papillomavirus, or HPV. Most will never know it. But for some, the infection may prove deadly.

That’s because the vast majority of cervical cancer cases are caused by two strains of the virus. And cervical cancer is difficult to treat, especially if it has spread beyond the cervix.

Fortunately, there’s a vaccine to protect against acquiring HPV infection and developing HPV-associated disease that can lead to cervical, vaginal, penile, anal, oral and throat cancers as well as genital warts.

The CDC recommends that boys and girls ages 9 through 14 receive two doses of the HPV vaccine at least six months apart. Older teens and adults up to age 26 should receive three doses of the vaccine. That’s because the immune system response to the vaccine is not as strong at later ages, and requires an additional dose to ensure protection.

**Side effects and safety**

The CDC and Food and Drug Administration monitor vaccines in the United States and have a wealth of data on the safety and effectiveness of the HPV vaccine. Potential side effects are mild and similar to those that might be experienced with other vaccines, such as soreness, swelling or redness at the vaccination site.

Less common side effects include headache, nausea, vomiting, fatigue or weakness. And though rare, the HPV vaccine causes some people to feel dizzy or faint. Sitting for 15 minutes after the injection can lower the risk of fainting.

“My children received their first dose when they were 12 years of age,” Dr. Sousou says. “I wanted to make sure they were protected in plenty of time for the vaccine to work.”

**Who and when to vaccinate**

The best time to receive the HPV vaccine is before exposure to the virus, which is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. The immunization is approved for ages 9 to 26. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends immunizing children beginning when they are 11 or 12.

“Some are devastating cancers,” says Costa Sousou, M.D., an Obstetrician/Gynecologist at Mayo Clinic Health System — Franciscan Healthcare in La Crosse. “I strongly recommend this vaccine to all of my patients who are under the age of 26 and to those who have young teenaged children. It can save a child’s life.”

For the recommended vaccine schedule for adults, visit mayoclinichealthsystem.org/vaccine

“The bottom line is that this is a safe, effective vaccine that can prevent several types of cancers in both boys and girls,” Dr. Sousou says. “It’s an easy way for parents to protect their kids far into the future. What a gift to give them.”
Back-to-school time means back to homework for the kids – and back to making lunches for parents. This year, take your inspiration from the fairground and try layering your kids’ favorite foods on a wooden skewer or cake pop stick. Emily Schmidt, a registered dietitian at Mayo Clinic Health System in Albert Lea, offers these ideas to get you started:

**Sandwich kabobs**
Layer cubed bread, meat, cheese and slices of lettuce. Send mustard and mayo for dipping.

**Breakfast for lunch**
Alternate small pieces of French toast or mini waffles with berries or banana slices. Include a side of syrup. (And a wet wipe.)

**Salad on a stick**
Skewer chunks of romaine lettuce, cherry tomatoes, sliced cucumbers and cheese and send a side of your child’s favorite dressing. Or try a fruit salad: melon balls, berries and banana slices with a container of yogurt for dipping.

**Dessert**
Layer marshmallows and brownie chunks for an easy sweet treat.

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Our Hometown Health blog is a place for you to get information and resources to improve your health and well-being. Here are four recent posts that generated some buzz. [mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health](http://mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health)

**Calorie counts: New menu labeling rule in effect**
Earlier this year, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration began requiring restaurants and other establishments that have 20 or more locations disclose the number of calories contained in standard menu items. This gives consumers access to consistent calorie and nutrition information they can use to make informed decisions about what to eat and drink. Learn more and get tips for watching portion sizes while dining out.

**Finding happiness, gratitude in sobriety**
Addiction changes the brain in a way that limits your ability to feel happy. In time, and with sobriety, the brain heals and learns to send the right cues again. Gather tips on getting started on a path to create a happier you in sobriety.

**Headache medications: Get the facts**
Headaches can be pounding, piercing, throbbing or dull, but no matter what, they are always a pain. Learn how prescription medications can treat acute headaches, prevent future headaches, and/or reduce the severity and frequency of headaches.

**The importance of a cancer survivorship care plan**
Cancer care doesn’t end just because treatment is done. You may have long-term physical and emotional effects. Discover how a survivorship care plan can empower you to use resources and education as you move forward and successfully transition to life after cancer treatment.
Taking care of yourself

How can I get the most out of my relationship with my primary care team?

I think the first step is developing a good relationship with your primary care provider, whether that’s a physician, physician assistant or nurse practitioner. Your provider needs to be someone you trust and feel comfortable with so you can talk openly about your health and sensitive issues that come up. Honest information is essential to helping us play quarterback for the rest of your care team and connecting you to the right caregivers — such as a pharmacist, psychologist or dietitian — as health concerns arise. We also need to know your family health history. That information helps us make the right recommendations for things like when to start cancer screenings.

I also recommend using our electronic resources to connect with your care team and stay up-to-date on your own medical information. By signing up for Patient Online Services, you can communicate with your provider, check your test results and medical records and see your upcoming appointment schedule. It’s free and can be used 24/7, which is something I appreciate as a patient myself. I don’t have to try and reach my provider’s office during hours when I’m working, and can get the information I need when it’s most convenient for me. Another electronic option I recommend to my patients is Express Care Online.

The service offers care for 14 common conditions, including pink eye, sore throat and urinary tract infections.

Bottom line: I think getting the most out of your primary care team involves honest, open communication and knowing what resources are available — and using them. We have a great team of people who want to work together with you. A big reason most of us choose to work in primary care is because we enjoy developing relationships with our patients. It’s a privilege to be let into our patients’ lives and work together to keep them healthy.

How can I get the most out of my relationship with my specialist?

You may not see a specialist very often, so it’s important to come to your appointment prepared to make the most of the time you have together. It can be helpful to write down your concerns and questions, so you can be sure to cover them with your doctor.

It’s helpful to if you write down and bring a list of the medications that you take (or bring the pill bottles to the appointment) so we can understand well which medications you are taking.

If prior evaluations or a work-up has been performed elsewhere and you have records or details about those prior evaluations, it is often useful to bring those to the appointment so your doctor can review them with you.

Consider bringing a family member or loved one with to your appointment. It can be helpful to have another set of ears in the room to help you remember all that is discussed and ask any questions you had not thought of or forgotten.
Meditation can wipe away the day’s stress, bringing with it inner peace. Try to meditate in a quiet setting while in a comfortable position such as sitting, lying down or even walking. Here are some ways you can practice meditation on your own, whenever you choose:

**BRAIN**
Read and reflect. Many people report that they benefit from reading poems or sacred texts, and taking a few moments to quietly reflect on their meaning. You can also listen to sacred music, spoken words, or any music you find relaxing or inspiring. You may want to write your reflections in a journal or discuss them with a friend or spiritual leader.

**HEART**
Focus your love and gratitude. In this type of meditation, you focus your attention on a sacred image or being, weaving feelings of love, compassion and gratitude into your thoughts. You can also close your eyes and use your imagination or gaze at representations of the image.

**LUNGS**
Breathe deeply. Focus all your attention on your breathing, and concentrate on feeling and listening as you inhale and exhale through your nostrils. Breathe deeply and slowly. When your attention wanders, gently return your focus to your breathing.

**MOUTH**
Repeat a mantra. You can create your own mantra, whether it’s religious or secular. Examples of religious mantras include the Lord’s Prayer in the Christian tradition, the holy name of God in Judaism, or the om mantra of Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern religions.

| A | Asymmetrical shape: One half is unlike the other half. |
| B | Border: Notched, irregular or scalloped borders. |
| C | Color: Multiple colors, changes in color or uneven color. |
| D | Diameter: Larger than 1/4 inch. |
| E | Evolving: Change in size, shape, color or height, or new signs and symptoms, such as itchiness or bleeding. |

Learning your ABCs the first time helped you read. Now, they could save your life. That’s because these ABCs can alert you to changes in moles that could signal melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer.

Your best chance of beating melanoma is to catch it early. If you notice any of the changes below, schedule an appointment with your provider.

“The first signs of melanoma are usually a change to an existing mole or a new skin growth,” Melanie Dixon, M.D., a dermatologist at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato, says. “They’re usually found on skin that has seen a lot of sun.”

To view a slideshow of the ABCDEs of moles, visit mayoclinichealthsystem.org/54321.
Colon cancer screening and prevention

For years, turning 50 came with a special birthday message from your health care provider: Time to have a colonoscopy.

Now, that message will be coming a bit sooner. The American Cancer Society recently updated those screening guidelines, recommending most people get their first colonoscopy at age 45.

“Colon cancer rates have been increasing in younger people,” says Daisy Batista, M.D., a gastroenterologist at Mayo Clinic Health System – Franciscan Healthcare in La Crosse. “The change in the guideline is designed to help us catch those cancers earlier, when they’re more likely to be curable.”

Whatever your age, Dr. Batista says there are other steps you can take to avoid developing colon cancer, the third-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States.

Eat your veggies and healthy fats
“Research has shown that the western diet correlates to higher colon cancer rates,” Dr. Batista says. “People who eat high-fiber diets are less likely to develop the disease.” She also recommends limiting the amount of meat you eat, especially processed meats.

Dr. Batista also emphasizes the importance of consuming healthy fats found in olive oil, salmon rich in Omega-3, avocados and nuts, as well as limiting low-processed fats found in fried food.

Get moving
You know exercise benefits your heart and can help you maintain your weight. It also may lower your risk of developing some types of cancer, including colon cancer. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week.

Watch your weight
According to the American Cancer Society, carrying extra pounds increases your risk of colon cancer, as well as cancers of the breast (in post-menopausal women), rectum, esophagus, pancreas and kidney, among others. Talk to your provider if you need help losing weight.

Limit alcohol, don’t smoke
If you choose to drink alcohol, do so moderately. That means no more than one drink a day for women, two drinks a day for men. And if you smoke, quit. Your provider can offer tips or refer you to a program to help you stop.

Follow screening guidelines
It’s so important; we’re going to end where we began. One of the most important cancer prevention strategies is to follow the colon cancer screening guidelines that are right for you based on your age, risk factors and family history.

“Getting recommended screenings is important for all cancers, but it’s especially beneficial with colon cancer because we have a chance to actually prevent cancer,” Dr. Batista says. “If we find a polyp, we can remove it before it turns cancerous.”
Don’t just sit there: Exercises for the office

Sitting at a desk all day can be harder than it sounds.

“Too much sitting in one position puts a lot of strain on the body,” Beau Johnson, physical therapist at Mayo Clinic Health System in Holmen, says. “It can leave you feeling stiff and sore.”

It can also leave you feeling tired. (We’re talking to you, 3 p.m. slump.)

To break the cycle, try getting up to move every half hour or so. Walk to get a drink of water or touch base with a colleague about something you’d normally discuss via email. Or, try a few of the stretches and exercises below, which can be done right from the comfort of your cubicle:

**Neck stretches**
Bring your chin to your chest and hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Then, rotate your head left and then right, holding 15 to 30 seconds on each side. Finally, tilt your head to the side, leaning your ear toward your shoulder. Again, hold for 15 to 30 seconds on each side.

**Standing stretches**
While standing, put a hand on your desk or chair to stabilize yourself. Bend one leg, grab your ankle and pull it toward your buttock. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds, then repeat on the other side. Then, stand with feet hip-width apart and arms crossed across your chest. Twist to the left, then the right. Hold for 30 seconds on each side.

**Pushups and triceps dips**
Use your desk to do pushups. Do triceps dips on the arms of your office chair.

“Just a small amount of movement throughout the day can really help you stay alert and focused,” Johnson says.

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**Homegrown Gardening Class-Preparing your Garden for Winter**
Learn how to prepare your garden for the winter, prep your soil for spring, and extend your growing season. Information presented by Mayo Clinic Health System-Franciscan Healthcare and WisCorps. To register for this free event, call 608-392-7748 or visit homegrowngardening.eventbrite.com.

**Wednesday, Oct. 3 | 6-7 p.m. | Myrick Park, La Crosse**

**Enchanted Forest**
Enchanted Forest is a non-scary, trick-or-treat hike where your child can wear their Halloween costume and meet friendly characters as they collect goodies along the way. Upon reaching the end of the hike, families will find a fall festival with activities, music, petting farm, and refreshments. Purchase tickets before Oct. 19 at 3 p.m. to enter through the “fast lane” and avoid long lines! Visit wiscorps.org/enchantedforest to buy tickets.

**Saturday, Oct. 20 | 10 a.m.-3 p.m. | Myrick Park, La Crosse**

**Franciscan Healthcare Auxiliary Jingle Bell Brunch**
This festive and fun holiday brunch for the whole family includes a children’s parade, visits with Santa Claus and hot chocolate bar. $22 for adults; $10 for children; free for children ages 3 and under. Call 608-392-4208 to make a reservation.

**Sunday, Dec. 2 | 9 a.m.; special seating for military families at 11:30 a.m. | The Waterfront, La Crosse**

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**Meals in Minutes with Chef Heather VanHorn**
Second Tuesday of each month
WKBT News 8 This Morning

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For more ideas to try, visit mayoclinichealthsystem.org/exercise.