

Take the Fast Track

to the Best in Breast Cancer Care

By Andrew Shanley



Dr. Vivian Miller, interim director of Breast Imaging (left) and Dr. Holly Mason, director of Breast Surgery (right).

SOMETIMES THE WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART.

Like when you learn there is an abnormality on your mammogram and need additional testing. While the time between the mammogram and the biopsy might only be a week or two, it feels like a lifetime.

For Sharon Motyl it was a terrifying case of déjà vu. Five years before, she'd been diagnosed with uterine cancer. She'd overcome that challenge, but now was facing the possibility of breast cancer.

It began with a routine annual mammogram at Baystate's Comprehensive Breast Center (CBC) for the 55 year-old Chicopee resident. The results of the exam raised concern with the radiologist who read it, so the staff contacted

Ms. Motyl advising her to return for an additional mammogram. "They got me in quickly," she says. "In fact, it was the very next day."

But when the second mammogram couldn't provide a conclusive result, she needed an ultrasound. "Again, I wanted to do it right away," Ms. Motyl says. And because her doctor had agreed to have her be part of the CBC's Fast Track service, that speedy ultrasound test was possible.

The Fast Track service at the Comprehensive Breast Center, part of the Baystate Regional Cancer Program, with services provided by Baystate Medical Center, significantly reduces the time between an abnormal mammogram and biopsy, and more importantly, through coordination of care,

reduces the time from abnormal mammogram to definitive treatment.

Ms. Motyl's ultrasound showed what looked like a cyst, but not with complete certainty. A biopsy was needed for confirmation. "I was very upset," she recalls. "I'm a cancer survivor. I thought, 'Oh, here I go again.' But everyone at the center was just so good to me. It made such a difference. They were so compassionate, so professional, so comforting. They took all the time needed to explain everything to me."

Again, she appreciated how quickly the breast center staff was able to schedule a needle biopsy, which was performed the next day. The final result was that the cyst was benign and she could rest easy.

Her experience is what Ben and Kathy Osborne had in mind when they donated money to the Comprehensive Breast Center to get the Fast Track service up and running. "When Kathy had breast cancer," says Ben Osborne, MD, "the waiting was a huge stressor. It was difficult to even have to wait a day. We were glad to support any way that helps people get through this process quickly so they can get the best care possible as soon as possible."

INCREASED EFFICIENCY, EXCEPTIONAL CARE

Without the Fast Track service, when an abnormality is suspected after a mammogram, the patient discusses the findings with her physician who orders a biopsy, schedules an appointment, then reviews the biopsy results. If anything further is needed, such as surgical excision or assessment for risk reducing medications, separate appointments must be made. Weeks might pass while this process moves along.

With Fast Track, the patient's physician agrees in advance that should an abnormality be detected on the mammogram, permission is granted to perform a biopsy, if indicated. The next steps happen right away. A nurse practitioner at the Comprehensive Breast Center, either Catherine Tipton or Glenda Flynn, then assumes coordination of the patient's care, completing a health history, performing a physical, and scheduling the ultrasound and core biopsy as soon as possible. Having a clinician examine the breasts prior to a biopsy

to see if the lesion can be felt provides valuable information. In most cases this appointment is made for that very day or the next business day.

Fortunately, most breast lumps and abnormal mammograms are benign. However, for those women who are found to have a high risk lesion or breast cancer, the next steps are carefully planned.

The center's breast surgeons, medical oncologists, and radiation oncologists work together to evaluate treatment and discuss options with each patient. Expert radiologists present the imaging findings, which are integrated with the biopsy results, and breast pathologists review details from biopsy and surgical specimens under the microscope. The multidisciplinary group of clinicians provides consensus as to treatment options, which may also include clinical trials.

Sharon Motyl says her experience was emotionally difficult and her fear was great, but she feels incredibly fortunate that the Fast Track service allowed her to move through the process so rapidly. And she felt lucky to be a patient at the Comprehensive Breast Center. "I just knew they would take care of me," she says. "I knew I'd be okay no matter what the biopsy showed. Absolutely everybody there was just wonderful, from beginning to end."

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Dr. Grace Makari-Judson, medical director, Comprehensive Breast Center, says that 70 percent of breast cancers are diagnosed in women with no risk factors other than their age and being female. Read more at baystatehealth.org/cbc.

The American Cancer Society and the experts at Baystate's Comprehensive Breast Center **recommend yearly screening mammography** starting at age 40 with no upper age limit. To schedule an appointment, call:

- Baystate's Comprehensive Breast Center, Springfield: 413-794-2255
- Baystate Franklin Medical Center, Greenfield: 413-773-2233
- Baystate Mary Lane Hospital, Ware: 866-531-8378