

Health

HIDDEN DANGER

Breast cancer can affect all, even the young

Maria Sonnenberg

Special to Florida Today | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

In his 2012 photo book, "Breast Cancer, the Journey Through Eyes of a Surgeon," Dr. Emran Imami chronicled the story of Heather Copley, 25 at the time, and the youngest breast cancer patient Imami had treated as medical director at TEPAS Breast Center in Melbourne.

"She underwent bilateral mastectomies with breast reconstruction, chemotherapy and radiation," Imami said.

Mid-treatment Heather married, took the last name McCollough, and later had a child. Unfortunately, the story did not end happily.

"Sadly, as is often the case with young cancer victims, she had aggressive disease," said Imami. "I grew close to her family and was honored to meet her husband, son and extended family when she passed (in March)."

Although breast cancer tends to affect women 50 or older, it is also found among young women and even teenagers. Eleven percent of all cases reported in the United States affect women under 45, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Heather Copley, seen at age 25 in March 2012, before beginning radiation treatment for breast cancer. Copley, who later married and took the last name McCollough, died earlier this year. PROVIDED

According to the National Cancer Institute, approximately 70,000 men and women age 15 to 39 are diagnosed annually with cancer in the United States. For women in this age group, breast cancer is the most common, for several reasons.

Because breast tissue is denser in younger women, mammograms are not as effective in detecting the disease in this population. Typically, women in this age bracket will detect breast abnormalities themselves, when it may already be at a later stage.

Research suggests that breast cancer in women under 40 tends to be more aggressive, because it may differ biologically from the cancer found in older women. The survival rate is lower, too.

Treatment for breast cancer is the same, irrespective of age.

"Assuming the person is in good health and does not have Stage IV (metastatic) cancer, then removing the cancer itself is paramount," Imami said. "Younger women warrant more aggressive therapies, though not necessarily more aggressive surgery."

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Warm weather dwellers not immune to flu, so get your shot



Pediatrics in Brevard
Dr. Betty Cheney Kelly

The arrival of fall and all things pumpkin is a distinct reminder that winter will soon be on its way.

Even though we live in Florida and it's much warmer climate than most other states during the winter season, this does not mean we are immune to the devastating flu effects which hit much colder climates of the country.

With this said, it's a great reminder to begin thinking about protecting yourself and your little ones this winter by acquiring that annual influenza vaccine.

The American Academy of Pediatrics

(AAP) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the influenza vaccine for everyone 6 months and older, with a select group of children over 2 years of age being eligible for the intranasal influenza vaccine.

From a pediatric perspective, there is no clinical preference between the actual shot (inactivated intramuscular injection) and the nasal spray (live attenuated influenza vaccine) to protect children from the influenza virus.

However, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccine is best for each of your children as certain conditions and criteria may exclude specific patients from receiving the intranasal vaccine option.

It's important to note, flu viruses are constantly changing with influenza vac-

cines updated from one season to the next.

In addition, our level of immunity from previous flu vaccines normally decline, an important reason to be vaccinated every season to protect against deadly flu strains.

This season's flu vaccine protects against four strains of the influenza virus expected to be circulating in the coming months.

In addition, antiviral medications are available for influenza treatment if diagnosed with the flu, which could shorten the duration of symptoms, though not a substitute in the efficacy of the vaccine.

What must be clear, the goal of all influenza vaccines is to prevent influenza

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It's that time of year when adults and children alike should get their annual flu shot. GETTY IMAGES

Keeping appointment big first step in getting treatment

From Staff Reports Florida Today
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Q: Why did you go into this career?

A: As long as I can remember I have always wanted to help people overcome their struggles with daily life and life's circumstances.

Q: What services do you provide?

A: I provide individual therapy, family therapy and marriage therapy. I also help people and their families come to terms with their sexual orientation or identity, whether it be gay or transgender. I am adept at handling the most serious issues and situations, including anger issues, suicidal ideations, obsessive-compulsive disorder, substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder. I also conduct pre-employment psychological evaluations for law enforcement agencies.

Q: What makes this area of medicine fulfilling for you?

A: Knowing that I have an integral role in helping people reduce their symptoms so that they can function better on a day-to-day basis, improve their quality of life, and live happier, more fulfilling lives. Helping people recover from the difficulties (mild or severe) that affect their day-to-day living helps not only the patient, but also their families and loved ones, as well.

Q: When did you realize this was the right medical career path for you?

A: Early on in college the courses I took in psychology and the work I did in

ancillary environments solidified my realization that diagnosing and treating patients was a good fit for me.

Q: What's the latest advancement in your field that will benefit patients?

A: Today there is less of a stigma surrounding mental health issues than when I started my career. This is encouraging more people to proactively seek treatment or at least reach out to a professional before their problems become overwhelming.

Q: Best advice for current and potential patients?

A: Go ahead and make that first appointment and keep it! Deciding to seek treatment and then actually making that first appointment is often the most daunting part for patients. Once you "walk through that door" and begin therapy, you'll feel a lot more comfortable with the whole process. Then, being an active participant is very important in achieving the desired results. Two other things that are important to remember are that with active participation in about 4-6 weeks you'll be feeling a whole lot better and more hopeful and optimistic that a bright future is within your grasp. It is not usually necessary to overhaul your life. We keep what is working for the patient/family and change what isn't. I am also keenly aware of the importance in working within the patient's "reality," meaning the patient and I work together to come up with real-life, logistically feasible solutions for the situation at hand.



Dr. Julie Mall is a clinical psychologist based in Viera. PROVIDED

Get to Know Your Health Pro

Name: Julie A. Mall, Psy.D.

Where are you based: East Coast Psychology

Education: B.S., Psychology, Florida Institute of Technology (with highest honors); M.S., Clinical Psychology, Florida Institute of Technology; Psy.D., Clinical Psychology, Florida Institute of Technology

Professional Background: Dr. Mall is a licensed clinical psychologist with extensive experience in the evaluation and treatment of a broad range of mental health issues for children, adolescents, adults and older adults. She develops individual and family plans to target and treat a multitude of disorders and psychological difficulties from mild to severe. She has significant experience in working with victims of abuse, trauma, neglect and abandonment. She is qualified to administer, score and interpret a variety of psychological evaluations to aid in risk assessment for law enforcement agencies, treatment centers, as well as to aid in diagnosis and treatment planning for individuals.

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Have a suggestion for FLORIDA TODAY's Know Your Health Pro feature? Contact Tim Walters at twalters@floridatoday.com

Cancer

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Partial removal of the breast, or lumpectomy, is followed by radiation therapy for women with small, single tumors. Mastectomy is indicated in other cases.

"There is a one to two percent chance of having two breast cancers simultaneously, which would justify a mastectomy," Imami said. "We counsel women with genetic mutations such as BRCA (the Breast Cancer gene) of their double or triple future breast cancer risk and often recommend double mastectomies."

Genetics often play a primary role in the breast cancer of younger victims, since they are not old enough for exposure to hormones or environmental factors to have triggered the disease.



Imami "Young women with breast cancer often have one or more family members with the same condition," Imami said.

Birth control pills during the teen years was once questioned as increasing the risk for breast cancer, but large studies have found very little, if any, increased risk, and simultaneously also discovered that the use of hormonal contraception actually reduces the chances a woman will develop cancer.

For women at risk for breast cancer, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network Guidelines recommend that young women undergo screening mammograms 10 years prior to the age that their youngest family member developed breast cancer, but not younger than 30. For screening MRIs, the recommendation is for women not younger



Heather Copley McCollough, right, with her husband and son, last year before being diagnosed again with breast cancer. She lost her battle with the disease in March 2019. PROVIDED

than 25.

Adolescents and women who have symptoms such as breast mass, nipple discharge, skin changes or breast pain should consider a medical evaluation and possible breast imaging.

Fortunately, breast cancer remains rare in the teen years, although there are documented cases.

"Teenage girls tend to have a plethora of anxiety-provoking life changes to deal with and I would first recommend that parents reassure their teen that breast cancer is very unlikely to occur in this age group," said Dr. Mary Ulrich, a pediatrician with Pediatrics in Brevard in Melbourne. In her more than 20 years in practice, Ulrich has not come upon a teen breast cancer case.

She cautions against breast self-exams in teens.

"They are far more likely to discover a lump that is normally growing breast



Heather Copley McCollough, holding her son, just days before passing in March. After beating breast cancer in 2012, McCollough's cancer returned last year. PROVIDED

tissue, a cyst or other benign lesion, which they are likely to then worry about to the point that they needlessly get a biopsy which leads to pain, risk of infection and unnecessary expense," she said.

To minimize risk of breast cancer, as well as other types of cancers, Ulrich offers advice many a mother have recommended to their offspring.

"Teach the child to eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, to get an at least an hour of moderate exercise per day ad to avoid becoming overweight or obese," Ulrich said. "Teaching children the importance of rest and of balance in life, which reduces stress, also will help reduce the risk of cancer as they grow older. A young person has the opportunity to make healthy choices that will

reduce their risk of cancer, along with other health problems."

She adds that the best way to make sure nothing serious is developing is to faithfully follow a regimen of yearly and thorough physical checkups that includes breast examinations.

For the younger cancer patients, the disease carries the possibility of early menopause, sexual dysfunction and loss of fertility due to treatment. Many of these women have to fight the disease while raising young families, and some may not have adequate health insurance to cover cancer care, adding to their stress and worry.

Breast cancer is life-changing at any age, but for the young survivors it is even more challenging.



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