



CANCER CARE

Robotic Surgery Returns Mother to Health

When 39-year-old Cynthia DeJesus went to her gynecologist for an annual check-up, she never expected the visit would lead to a cervical cancer diagnosis.

Shown: 39-year-old Cynthia DeJesus, benefitted from minimally invasive robotic surgery at RWJ to treat her cervical cancer and return home from the hospital only one day after the procedure. RWJ is the flagship cancer hospital of Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, the state's only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center.

A few days later, the doctor told the mother of five that her pap smear was abnormal, and brought her back into the office for a biopsy. "It came back that it was cancer. I don't think it hit me right away," said Ms. DeJesus, who lives in Carteret.

"Being diagnosed with cancer is one of the most emotionally stressful things a person can go through," said Mira Hellmann, MD, Assistant Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and a Gynecologic Oncologist at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ). RWJ is the flagship cancer hospital of Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, the state's only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Dr. Hellmann cared for Ms. DeJesus throughout her treatment, providing both the cutting-edge cancer treatment and the support services that are only available at a comprehensive cancer center. "This allowed me to provide the best care to Ms. DeJesus and to offer support services to lessen the impact of this disease on her daily life," said Dr. Hellmann.

After Dr. Hellmann performed another biopsy and confirmed that Ms. DeJesus had early cervical cancer, she recommended robotic surgery, using the da Vinci surgical system, to remove the cancer. Dr. Hellmann is one of only a few gynecologic oncologists

in New Jersey who perform robotic radical hysterectomy, and RWJ is one of a few hospitals in the state where this is available.

Being able to get home faster was important to Ms. DeJesus. While her two oldest children are married and living on their own, she still had two toddlers and a 13-year-old to care for. "I wanted to be home sooner than later. I didn't want too much time trying to recover," she said.

With the usual procedure, the abdominal incision would have been five to eight inches long and Ms. DeJesus would have been in the hospital for five to seven days afterwards. She would have needed narcotics for pain and help at home for up to four weeks, and recovery would have taken up to eight weeks. But with robotic surgery done through five dime-sized incisions, Ms. DeJesus only spent one night in the hospital. "Three days later I felt fine, almost normal. I couldn't believe I had this big surgery," she said. Following Dr. Hellmann's orders, she did have to wait three weeks to resume all of her normal activities.

To perform the procedure (removal of the uterus, cervix, one ovary, upper vagina and nearby lymph nodes), Dr. Hellmann sat at a console near Ms. DeJesus and used the robot's arms to insert a high-definition camera and tiny instruments into the small incisions. The high-resolution 3-D image let Dr. Hellmann see better and operate more accurately and more quickly than with the

usual procedure. Less blood loss is another benefit. Robotic surgery is appropriate for many patients with early cervical cancer.

Most cervical cancer can be prevented, according to Dr. Hellmann, through the HPV vaccine and annual pap smears. About 90 percent of cervical cancer is caused by the HPV infection and about 50 percent of women diagnosed with cervical cancer have not had a pap smear in the last 10 years.

Ms. DeJesus took her 13-year-old daughter Tatyana to her annual check-up to prepare Tatyana to care for herself in the future.

"The surgery was very successful and we removed the cancer in its entirety," said Dr. Hellmann.

Since Ms. DeJesus was at increased risk for cancer recurrence, she also had chemotherapy and radiation therapy. After completing her treatment in April, Ms. DeJesus threw herself a party and planned a trip to Disneyworld with her family.

Visit www.rwjh.edu/cancer or call 1-888-MD-RWJUH.



Shown: Mira Hellman, MD, Assistant Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and a Gynecologic Oncologist at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and RWJ, uses minimally invasive robotic surgery to treat cervical cancer.