Skin Cancer — Martha’s Story

How did you discover you had skin cancer?

I noticed a few small spots on my face were always peeling, even though it had been years since I had regular exposure to the sun. I also had spots on my chest and on my back that would itch. I made an appointment with Dr. Basil Cherpelis in the Cutaneous Oncology Program at Moffitt Cancer Center. He performed a thorough examination, paying close attention to the spots on my face. At that moment, Dr. Cherpelis turned to his fellow and said “I’m not concerned about those (pointing to my face), but I do want this one biopsied” (pointing to a freckle on my chest). Sure enough, that freckle came back positive for basal cell carcinoma, a common form of skin cancer.

What did the doctor say contributed to developing the disease?

Dr. Cherpelis explained I had extensive solar damage. He said it was the result of years of sun exposure during my childhood. I grew up in Venezuela and practically lived at the beach on weekends. I was not a sun worshiper, but loved sailing, water skiing and other water sports. I had constant exposure to the sun and did not realize the damage I was doing to my skin.

Were they able to remove the cancer?

Fortunately yes, but it took two excisional surgeries to remove the cancer. The original suspicious spot was just a freckle on my chest. But after the initial intervention, I had to undergo a second, larger excisional biopsy. I was surprised to realize the cancer site was larger than expected.

What steps do you now take to protect yourself from the sun?

I am now very conscious when I’m in the sun. When I go to the beach, I go very early or late in the day and I make sure there is shade available. I avoid going to the beach during peak hours. I apply sunscreen very often; wear a hat and other protective clothing. I also make sure my family is well protected from the sun.

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Moffitt Cancer Center Lunch ‘n Learn Series

Answering your questions about skin cancer

Dr. Ricardo Gonzalez and Dr. Jonathan Zager, two of Moffitt Cancer Center’s leading surgical oncologists, will share an update on the latest advances in skin cancer screening, treatment and new advances in research, as well as answer your questions at this free event.

Saturday, April 11, 2015 | 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.
San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino
1309 Ashford Ave. | San Juan, PR 00907

Free skin cancer screenings will be offered at the event! Register at www.Moffitt.org/PRevent or call 1-800-456-3434, ext. 8550.

Thank you to Takeda Oncology and Advanced Home Health for sponsoring the event.

Meet the Doctors

RICARDO GONZALEZ, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Dr. Ricardo Gonzalez is a surgical oncologist and Chair of the Sarcoma Department at Moffitt Cancer Center, where he also serves as a member of the Cutaneous Oncology Program. He is an associate professor at the University Of South Florida College of Medicine’s Department of Oncologic Sciences and Department of Surgery.

JONATHAN ZAGER, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Dr. Jonathan Zager is the Director of Regional Therapies at Moffitt Cancer Center and the Chair of Graduate Medical Education. Dr. Zager is an associate member and surgical oncologist in both the Cutaneous Oncology and Sarcoma Programs. He is an associate professor of surgery in the departments of Oncological Sciences and Surgery at the University of South Florida.
Moffitt’s Dr. Melissa Alsina Talks with Students in Puerto Rico

Moffitt’s Dr. Melissa Alsina visited the Cupeyville School in Cupey Bajo, Puerto Rico on February 13 to speak to a group of nearly 100 sixth grade students about the importance of cancer awareness and early detection. The students are currently learning about the human body and one of their teachers was recently diagnosed with breast cancer.

During the interactive discussion, Dr. Alsina defined cancer, emphasizing the numerous types of the disease. She explained cancer is a treatable and often curable disease. The students learned about the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and avoiding habits, such as smoking, that may increase a person’s risk of developing cancer.

In 2011, Dr. Alsina and Dr. Luis Baez, director of the Cancer Center in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, helped establish a partnership between Moffitt and the Cancer Center at the Metro Medical Center. Together they opened a Blood and Marrow Transplant (BMT) evaluation and follow-up clinic. Dr. Alsina and Dr. José Ochoa-Bayona travel to the island once a month to see patients who have been referred by physicians as candidates for a blood and marrow transplant.

Since 2000, Dr. Alsina has been an associate professor of medicine in the Blood and Marrow Transplant Program at Moffitt Cancer Center. She is also the head of the Multiple Myeloma Transplant Program. Dr. Alsina graduated from the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine. She completed her residency in internal medicine at San Juan Veterans Administration Hospital, followed by a fellowship in hematology at San Juan City Hospital in Puerto Rico. She completed her fellowship in Hematology-Oncology at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio.

BREAST CANCER, DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

The Puerto Rico Advisory Council for Moffitt Cancer Center hosted its seventh lunch ‘n learn event in November. Featured presenter Dr. Christine Laronga, a surgical oncologist specializing in breast cancer, spoke to a group of nearly 130 attendees about the latest screening methods, treatment options and research advances in the fight against breast cancer. Thank you to the American Cancer Society and Millennium Pharmaceuticals for cosponsoring the event.
GET INVOLVED!
JOIN THE PUERTO RICO ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Puerto Rico Advisory Council for Moffitt Cancer Center was established in November 2010. Led by Kimberly Casiano, a member of Moffitt’s national Board of Advisors, the Council consists of a group of grateful patients, family members and friends who work together to raise awareness about cancer and Moffitt in Puerto Rico.

We are seeking for new members to spearhead initiatives to grow Moffitt’s presence on the island. If you are interested in helping with event planning, fundraising, marketing, communications and new membership, email us at PuertoRico@Moffitt.org or call 1-800-456-3434, ext. INTL (4685). Visit MOFFITT.org/PuertoRico for more information.

Moffitt at a Glance
Moffitt opened in 1986 on the campus of the University of South Florida in Tampa with approximately 400 employees. Today, Moffitt employs approximately 4,600 people and generates more than $1.94 billion in direct economic output.

- Employees include:
  - 236 physicians
  - 513 residents and fellows
  - 555 researchers and support staff
  - Moffitt Cancer Center trains more students in the field of oncology than all other Florida institutions combined.
  - Nearly 600 volunteers work in multiple service areas throughout the Cancer Center.

As the third largest cancer center in the nation based on patient volume, Moffitt offers a level of service that stands above the rest. Each year, thousands of patients walk through our doors seeking personalized, compassionate care and hope.

Patients Volumes (FY 2014)
- New patients.................................17,383
- Admissions ........................................9,153
- Beds........................................................206
- Average hospital stay......................6.4 days
- Outpatient Visits............................339,565
- Screening Visits..............................14,640
- Surgical Cases.................................9,571

Moffitt has received a 96% inpatient and 95% outpatient satisfaction score for quality of care. We are 100 percent focused on cancer care, and for our patients, this means better outcomes and the best chance for beating cancer.

WHAT MAKES MOFFITT DIFFERENT?
(Below are three examples. You’ll see more in future issues!)

#1 Moffitt Cancer Center has earned the prestigious Magnet® designation in recognition of its nursing excellence. Magnet recognition is granted by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), the credentialing body of the American Nurses Association, to honor outstanding health care organizations for nursing professionalism, teamwork, quality patient care and innovations in nursing practices. Today, only 7 percent of national and international health care organizations are recognized by the ANCC Magnet Recognition Program®.

#2 Moffitt is home to the Melanoma Brain and Spine Tumor Clinic, one of the first in the world dedicated to treating patients with this all too common problem. Five to 25 percent of cancer patients will develop metastases in the brain. Brain tumors are the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in children younger than 20 and in males ages 20-39.

#3 Over the past decade, Moffitt has been named a Best Place to Work by numerous publications, including Computerworld, Florida Trend, Tampa Bay Times, Science magazine, Working Mother magazine and WorkplaceDynamics.
Two days after Independence Day Richard House did not feel well. At first he thought he ate something that disagreed with him, but when he started feeling spasms in his throat he called his doctor. House’s esophageal wall had thickened, and further testing revealed a tumor and an esophageal cancer diagnosis. House immediately sought treatment at Moffitt Cancer Center because the facility had a dedicated thoracic surgeon who specialized in and performed numerous esophagectomy procedures a year.

“Moffitt gave me the best chance for a quick recovery. I was looking for a doctor who was proficient in the specific kind of surgery I needed. While I was at Moffitt, my treatment team made me feel like I was their only patient,” says House.

Moffitt’s five-year survival rate for esophageal patients is 37.9 percent, which far exceeds the national average of 17.8 percent.

“At Moffitt, our surgical oncologists perform robotic surgery for cancer on a routine basis. Our treatment team approaches each case focused on the patient’s individual needs. Oncologists, radiologists and surgeons work together to do everything possible to help our patients return home, where they can begin their recovery more quickly,” says Mokenge Malafa, M.D., chair of Moffitt’s Gastrointestinal Oncology Program.

When Jean Chase’s back pain became unbearable, she called an ambulance and was taken to the hospital where they diagnosed her with pancreatitis. Knowing pancreatitis did not run in her family, Chase and her specialist decided to pursue an endoscopic pancreatic biopsy. After the biopsy results came back suspicious, Chase decided a surgical intervention at Moffitt was her best option.

Chase lives alone in her Sarasota, Florida home and quick recovery was important to her. Moffitt has integrated minimally invasive and robotic-assisted surgery as an alternative to traditional surgery. Chase decided to undergo a da Vinci® minimally invasive robotic surgery procedure to remove her suspicious cells.

“When I was faced with the possibility of extensive surgery, I wanted to be sure I gave myself the best chance possible while having the least invasive treatment,” explains Chase.

The Moffitt Institute for Robotic Cancer Surgery is one of a select few multispecialty robotic programs in the United States and the largest in the Southeast. The highly specialized surgical team offers a variety of gastrointestinal cancer treatment options including the Whipple procedure, transanal endoscopic microsurgery and robotic esophageal surgery, among others.

Robotic surgery allows patients to return home from the hospital more quickly, offers shorter recovery time and helps to decrease pain and minimize blood loss. For pancreatic cancer cases like Chase’s, Moffitt is out-performing the national average for outcomes for patients, more than doubling the five-year survival rate.

Appointments can be made to discuss the pros and cons of robotic surgery. To schedule an appointment, call 1-888-MOFFITT (1-888-663-3488) or visit MOFFITT.org/Robotics.