

An Unrivaled Commitment to Excellence: Cathy's Story

Waleed Ezzat, MD, FACS, director of the Division of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, took the lead in Cathy Frank's care, showcasing the medical excellence and quality of care Boston Medical Center delivers to its patients each and every day.

Cathy Frank's favorite days are "nana days"—having picnics, making trips to the bookstore, doing art projects or whipping up her world famous milkshake are all possible activities on the two days a week she babysits her grandchildren. She credits those days as the most important moments of her life, which is why a lump discovered on her nose left her blindsided and concerned for what this could mean for herself and the family she loved so dearly.

As a breast cancer survivor, Cathy knew it was important to waste no time in seeking medical attention. Immediately, she visited her dermatologist who performed a biopsy on the area, confirming the lump, located on the left side of her nose, was actually a very tangled and invasive malignant tumor referred to as adnexal eccrine carcinoma—a rare cancer of the sweat glands. Upon receiving the results, Cathy's first call was to a family friend and physician at Boston Medical Center seeking advice on what to do next. Her friend, Michael Platt, MD, MSc, an otolaryngology physician at

BMC, immediately sprang into action and assembled a care team for Cathy. "I work really closely with head and neck surgeons at BMC who I knew could take care of her so I felt like I was in a good position to provide counsel and help [the Franks] get to the right place and the right people," Platt recalls.

The very first person Platt contacted was BMC colleague, Waleed Ezzat, MD, FACS, director of the Division of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, asking him if he would take the lead in Cathy's care. "I just had full confidence in him. I know what Dr. Ezzat does, I've seen his work and I think I gave [Cathy] that [same] confidence that she had in me. This is the guy who will do the best work," Platt says.

After meeting with Ezzat, Cathy agreed upon an aggressive treatment plan consisting of tumor removal, reconstruction and then radiation. Given the complexities of her new diagnosis, she was justifiably anxious but never felt alone due to the support of

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Ezzat's team. "It's the most comforting medical situation I can ever imagine. I mean every single person who crossed my path made me feel like I was their patient. They were there for me," Cathy recalls.

The first course of action was for Cathy to meet with Bichchau T. Nguyen, MD, medical director of BMC's Mohs Surgical Unit, who would perform her tumor removal. Mohs surgery is a preferred method of treating most skin cancers, where small samples are taken on the outside of the tumor and looked at to determine whether or not the lesion is completely removed. Mohs surgery is unique because it allows the surgeon to map and remove not just the visible parts of a skin cancer, but also the roots that can only be seen under a microscope. The surgery is performed while patients are awake, and although patients are kept comfortable during the procedure, being awake for it became an overwhelming fear for Cathy. Nguyen, recognizing this reality, made it a priority to keep Cathy calm, reassuring her throughout the process. It's an element of care Cathy saw often at BMC and warmly recalls: "On top of all the scientific knowledge, there was a sense of human knowledge that came across with every person I dealt with at BMC."

Upon completion of the surgery, Cathy was left with a fist-sized hole on the left side of her face due to how entangled and deeply embedded the tumor was. With her face wrapped and covered, Cathy went home in preparation of the long surgery awaiting her the following morning—a lengthy reconstruction surgery. "This was a more difficult reconstruction than if you were to reconstruct the entire nose because now you have to create a reconstruction that closely matches her [right, untouched] side," Ezzat explains.

In order to execute this reconstruction, tissue lining from inside the nose as well as rib cartilage were used. A skin flap was then created by taking skin from her forehead and rotating it down on top of her nose, remaining attached for approximately three weeks in order to heal and grow into the surrounding area. Though the surgery was long and extensive, Cathy was only required to spend one night in the hospital for monitoring. "I'm not unfamiliar with good medicine. I have been to a lot of hospitals, and I just don't think there have been any that have stood out quite as much as Boston Medical Center," says Cathy fondly.

This is something that comes as no surprise to Platt who kept up with her progress throughout her journey. "She noticed that in her care people went above and beyond and were able to provide those extra things and it made a difference for her. That is a byproduct

of being at BMC that does this on a daily basis," he says.

After being discharged, Cathy was able to go home and start healing. She went from a full face mask into a simple bandage over the surgical area in the course of a few weeks. Not long after, she began intense radiation five days a week, for six weeks, which ultimately prompted a second surgery with Ezzat. "Because of the radiation therapy, she suffered a little bit of asymmetry and blockage in the nose due to scarring so we did a small revision procedure to get her more in line with the other side of her nose," he explains.

Since then, Cathy has made a remarkable recovery and most importantly, remains cancer-free. With surgery and facial reconstruction to that extent, she is thrilled to see no visible



difference; instead, feeling and looking like her normal self which means everything to her and her family. "Being able to give that to my patients puts a smile on my face—it just puts a hop in my step and really drives me to continue to do what I do," says Ezzat. For her follow-up care, she continues to have appointments with Ezzat, who refers to her warmly as a welcomed presence for every one of his colleagues.

Cathy's story is just one of many showcasing BMC's excellence in all areas of medicine. "I like to call BMC a diamond in the rough. If you look at the medical expertise of our physicians over all specialties and if you look at the commitment of our staff—[everyone] from our receptionists to our schedulers to our medical assistants and nurses—it really highlights the quality of care that we're driven to provide," Ezzat says. And that is not lost on Cathy, who holds immense gratitude for her care team and every staff member at BMC who brightened some of her darkest days. "The work [at BMC] doesn't just save a life, it restores a life. [BMC] didn't just give back my life, it gave back a nana to my grandchildren, and I am eternally grateful for the precious time I will continue to have with them."