



FOCUS *magazine*

STORIES TO
INSPIRE YOU

MEET OUR BRAND
AMBASSADOR

DOT!

TOUR OUR NEW
**IMAGING
SUITE**



NebraskaCancer.com

Letter *from* THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

As we get ready to embark on another new year, I can't help but think of how fast this one flew by. It's like I blinked and when I opened my eyes, homes were decorated with holiday lights and cheer, there was more hustle and bustle in the streets and stores, and cooler temperatures in the air.

As fast as it went by for me, for others, this year had a nice rhythm to it. We adapted to new normals, while adjusting to new challenges and obstacles that came our way. During this time we learned to shift, pivot, and lean in to what's really important in our lives.

For the NCS family, this year brought lots of new additions including employees, locations, babies, and furry four-legged friends. We also hold in our hearts those that are gone.

This issue brings home the importance of being thankful and grateful. I hope you enjoy the inspiring stories from two NCS patients and their remarkable journeys. Also highlighted are some favorite recipes, our state-of-the-art imaging suite, and you'll meet our new NCS brand ambassador, Dot!

For the next year, let's count our blessings. Be grateful for what we have and thankful for those around us. Let's celebrate with a joyful and forgiving heart and welcome this new year with big, wide, open arms. You deserve it.

Enjoy!

Kelly



Kelly Horn, *Director of Marketing & Community Outreach*

FOCUS *magazine*

Editor-in-Chief

Kelly Horn

Contributing Editor/Creative Directors

Sara Putters

Chip Thompson

Editorial Director

Danielle Geiger, MSN, APRN-NP, AOCNP

Writers

Kelly Horn



CONTENTS

features



07

NEW IMAGING SUITE



08

STORY OF THANKS



12

MEET DOT



Listen to our podcast on
NebraskaCancer.com/podcasts

06

GENETIC COUNSELING

Meet Michaela Sherbeck and Megan Schriener

07

IMAGING SUITE

Tour our beautiful new facility

08

SURVIVOR STORY

Dave Pacsoza's story of thankfulness

10

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

The folks we rely on to make our community a family

12

MEET DOT

Our spunky new brand ambassador

13

SWEET & SPICY

Treats to brighten your holidays

14

SURVIVOR STORY

Miranda Lopez on experiencing treatment while pregnant



CONVENIENT COMMUNITY CANCER CARE

Midwest Cancer Center - Legacy

17201 Wright Street, Suite 200, Omaha, NE 68130

Methodist Estabrook Cancer Center

8303 Dodge Street, Suite 250, Omaha, NE 68114

Henry Lynch Cancer Center - Bergan

7500 Mercy Road, Suite 1300, Omaha, NE 68124

Midwest Cancer Center - Papillion

611 Fenwick Drive, Papillion, NE 68046

Methodist Fremont Health

450 East 23rd Street, Fremont, NE 68025

Think Whole Person Healthcare

7100 West Center Road, Omaha, NE 68106

NEW!

Regional Cancer Center – St Francis – Grand Island

2730 West Faidley Avenue, Grand Island, NE 68803

Landmark Center – Hastings

2727 West 2nd Street, Hastings, NE 68901

*Outreach Clinics

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Locations
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Largest

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CANCER CARE PROVIDER



GENETIC Counseling

UNDERSTAND YOUR INHERITED CANCER RISK.



Genetic counseling at Nebraska Cancer Specialists can help you and your family understand your inherited cancer risk.

This process is designed to help you understand your risk for hereditary cancer and make informed decisions about your care.

During your appointment, a genetics provider may talk with you about:

- *Your medical history*
- *Your family history of cancer*
- *Your family history of other medical conditions*

This information is used to estimate the chance that you have a hereditary condition that causes a higher than usual risk for cancer. This is called a cancer risk assessment.

You may also talk about genetic testing, cancer screening and cancer prevention options during this visit. The genetics provider will help you understand your risk and help you make decisions that are best for you. Based on this information, you can decide whether genetic testing is right for you or a relative. •



Michaela Sherbeck
APRN-CNS, AOCNS, AGCNS-BC



Megan Schriener
PA-C



For more information or to
schedule an appointment, visit
NebraskaCancer.com/genetics



Nebraska Cancer Specialists is proud to bring the latest in molecular level PET/CT imaging with a Biograph Horizon™ PET/CT scanner.

This state-of-the-art scanner gives patients the opportunity for low radiation CT scans and a wide variety of clinical imaging using the latest technology available.

WHAT IS A CT SCAN?

Computed Tomography scans (CT scans) are specialized X-ray imaging scans that produce a 3D image of your body and organs. This cross-sectional technology allows for the most accurate localization, size and shape of tumors and lesions. The sensitivity and accuracy of this information is of extreme value in determining your treatment options.

WHAT IS A PET SCAN?

A Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scan is a highly specialized and effective way to visualize the metabolic activity of the cells inside the body. This activity will produce images that will identify the location of diseases such as cancer and the possible spread of the disease to other areas of the body.

A PET scan allows physicians to see changes in cancer in a way that has never before been possible.

This is because the radioactive medicine (dose) that is used for these scans is mixed with sugar. Your body's natural tendency is to absorb sugar. As your body absorbs the sugar, it also absorbs the radioactive medicine. If your cancer/tumor is already dead or dying, it will not absorb the sugar and radioactive medicine.

This gives physicians an alternative technique to evaluate treatments earlier, perhaps even leading to modifications in treatment.

Perhaps most importantly, a PET scan puts time on your side. The earlier the diagnosis and the more accurate the assessment of the extent of disease, the better the chance for successful treatment. •



Tour the imaging suite at Midwest Cancer Center-
Legacy in Omaha. Take a virtual tour by visiting
NebraskaCancer.com/imaging

Thankful: Dave Paczosa

“LIFE IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR AND IT’S WORTH SHARING THE STORY WITH OTHERS WHO NEED TO HEAR IT’S GOING TO BE OK.”

Nearing 60 years old, frequenting the gym almost every day, and in the best shape of his life, Dave Paczosa, a Concentrated Water Technician from Columbus, Nebraska says he has a lot to be thankful for this year.

In 2019, Dave was adjusting to a new normal after having just lost his wife of 33 years. He said things went from bad to worse when the dream home he and his wife had built together flooded due to heavy rains in the area. Then after a routine wellness exam, Dave’s doctor called him with results from a Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test. The protein in his blood was elevated and Dave was referred to a local urologist.

After a series of tests and scans, Dave was diagnosed with prostate cancer. As if that wasn’t enough, the scans also showed another tumor on the base of his spine. He was also diagnosed with Ewing Sarcoma, a cancer that forms in the bone or soft tissue of the body. Dave recalls the news being overwhelming. “I reached out to my boys and my pastor. My dad had twelve years of cancer treatments so I had some experience with dealing with a diagnosis. But times were different now.”

Dave underwent prostate removal surgery on December 26th, 2019 and the next decision was what to do with the sarcoma. He did some research and took it upon himself to set up a doctor’s visit in Rochester, Minnesota. His cancer was growing around four nerves on his spine and surgery was a risky option. “I was told that due to the location of the tumor, paralysis was a likely possibility and so

were complications from a surgery like this. The doctor I saw in Minnesota said there’s only one doctor in Nebraska I would refer you to see for a sarcoma and that was Dr. Kirsten Leu.”

Dave’s first course of treatment consisted of 8 weeks of chemotherapy with Dr. Leu’s team. “Dave received very aggressive chemotherapy for almost a year and tolerated it, overall, very well. He had a very apparent “let’s do this” attitude that helped him get through the rough spots. By doing so, he has given himself the best possible chance of being cured,” said Dr. Leu.

“Due to the pandemic, I had to receive my treatments all alone,” said Dave. The second course of treatment was 30 rounds of proton radiation, a treatment rarely found in the United States, to shrink the tumor. This was done in collaboration with his healthcare team in Minnesota. Dave recalls these days being some of the most difficult. “Forty-five days to be exact. I relied on social media to keep me connected to loved ones, and calls from friends and family to help keep me going,” recalls Dave.



The last part of Dave’s treatment was another eight weeks of chemotherapy. Dave was fortunate to have family in Omaha for support, but he especially thanks his nurse, Machele, at NCS. “She’s my guardian angel. She called and visited with me every day. She’s one of the main reasons I survived this. The support she provided went above and beyond. She gave the biggest hugs and she was just incredible.”

Machele gives Dave all the credit. “Dave went through a very extensive treatment regimen with IV chemotherapy and radiation. During that year, he never ventured away from his positivity. His optimistic attitude definitely rubbed off on me in my work activities, as well as my home activities. He is a refreshing reminder that our team, our office, and all the support staff, makes a huge impact on patients,” said Machele Dunning, NCS Nurse Case Manager.

In February of this year, Dave’s cancer was in remission.

“The past couple years were a very lonely time. If it wasn’t for my faith, family, and friends who reached out to me and my medical team, I don’t know what I would have done.”

Dave is 100% back to work, working crazy hours. His most recent scans are clear and he says he feels great. “I’m healthier now than I was before cancer. My weight is down, my blood pressure is where it’s supposed to be and I feel stronger than ever.” He spends his days with his friends, sons, and triplet grandsons who are now seven years old. He enjoys riding his Harley, camping, and enjoying his acreage. He’s also become an advocate for others going through their cancer journey and enjoys lending a listening ear.

When asked what he’s thankful for this year, he said that’s easy. “This year I get to be with my family. I’m cooking and having everyone over. Life is worth fighting for...it’s worth sharing the story with others who need to hear, “it’s going to be ok.”



Dave and his grandkids

Volunteer Spotlight:

"I HOPE TO CONTINUE AS LONG AS I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN HELPING SOMEONE COPE WITH THE CHALLENGES OF CANCER TREATMENT."

WE RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SIT DOWN WITH ONE OF OUR WONDERFUL NCS VOLUNTEERS, JAMES.

How long have you been volunteering for Nebraska Cancer Specialists (NCS)?

I have been volunteering at Nebraska Cancer Specialists for the past 11 months. I started in January of 2021.

When did you decide it was a good time for you personally to begin volunteering?

I had esophageal cancer, and three years ago successfully went through radiation, chemo, and surgery. Dr. Langdon is my oncologist and I owe much to him and others who healed me. So far, I am cancer free. I appreciated the great care that I received from NCS when I was a patient (through the efforts of the doctors, nurses, navigators, and caregivers). About a year ago, I asked Dr. Langdon if he could use a volunteer in the infusion center at one of the NCS clinics. I told him that I wanted to give back to a great organization in hopes that I could help others who were going through what I had experienced.

What does a typical volunteer day look like to you?

I volunteer at the Legacy Clinic one or two times a week for a few hours in the infusion suite. I feel a part of the dedicated team of health care professionals at the clinic and offer what I can in the way of patient support and care. I enjoy offering patients a warm blanket, beverage, snack, or an encouraging word of optimism and joy, as they receive treatment. My goal is to listen, understand, respect and support each patient regardless of what each day brings and how a patient feels. I hope I can help each patient smile and leave with a positive attitude for the day.

**Are you interested in volunteering at NCS?
Visit NCSHopefoundation.org to apply!**



What is your favorite part about volunteering at NCS?

Patient smiles and nursing staff camaraderie are what I enjoy most. Those things are powerful and are noticed by everyone. I know they help brighten the day for each patient.

Why do you continue being part of the NCS volunteer program?

I feel blessed that I can be included in the volunteer program at NCS. I hope to continue as long as I can make a difference in helping someone cope with the challenges of cancer treatment.

Do you have a message to share with others?

If I have a message to share, it would be for each patient to smile and maintain an optimistic attitude. Attitude is an important ingredient for achieving positive outcomes. And, I hope that others, when they can, will consider volunteering at NCS, and supporting the mission. It is very rewarding and a way to give forward to those who may need some encouragement and support.

"Dr. Langdon is my oncologist and I owe much to him and others who healed me."

James, NCS Volunteer



Meet DOT

As one of the newest members of the NCS family, Dot is our Brand Ambassador.

You may have seen her even before she made her official debut as she appeared in our advertising, billboards, and even in the “dot” com of our website address. In our exclusive one-on-one interview, Dot said that her main job is “to bring smiles and hope to both patients and staff at Nebraska Cancer Specialists.”

A bit of a self-proclaimed diva, her spunky attitude and always-helpful manner adds fun to our days. She told us that next year she’s planning to play a more educational role, giving tips and advice and pointing to helpful resources.

Dot’s also excited to have a whole month (DOTober) to celebrate the wonderful care patients and their families receive at NCS.

Next time you see her, make sure you say hello (she’s never too shy to give an autograph).



Sweet & Spicy SO-HO-HO GOOD!

CRANBERRY ALMOND CHRISTMAS COOKIES

3 c. unbleached, all-purpose flour
1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp baking soda
½ c. butter softened
1 c. granulated sugar
1 c. brown sugar, packed
1 egg
¼ c. milk
2 tbsp lemon juice
3 c. fresh cranberries, chopped
1 c. chopped almonds, toasted

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt, and baking soda.

In another mixing bowl, cream together the butter and sugars with a hand mixer or a kitchen aid. Beat in the egg, milk and lemon juice. Add the flour mixture and beat until combined. This will be a stiff dough. Add in the cranberries and almonds and mix well.

Drop by tablespoons onto the prepared baking sheets. Bake 12 to 15 minutes or until golden. Cool on wire racks.

CRANBERRY JALAPENO DIP

¼ cup sour cream
8 oz cream cheese (softened)
6 oz fresh cranberries
3 green onions chopped
1 jalapeno pepper seeded & chopped
1 ½ c. sugar
¼ teaspoon salt

In a food processor, combine the cranberries, jalapeno, sugar and salt. Pulse until very finely chopped.

Place the softened cream cheese in a medium bowl. Use a hand mixer to whip the cream cheese until it has a soft and smooth consistency. Add the sour cream and beat until combined.

Drain excess liquid from the cranberry jalapeno mixture. Add the cranberry mixture to the cream cheese mixture, beat until combined.

Serve with crackers for dipping.

This can also be made up to one day in advance and stored in an airtight container in the fridge. If some liquid separates, stir well before serving.



A Holiday Gift of Gratefulness

“WE TAKE FOR GRANTED SOMETIMES WHAT WE HAVE AND ESPECIALLY THIS YEAR, I’M EXTRA GRATEFUL.”

“I remembered thinking, am I going into labor? Am I going to be delivering a baby way before we’re ready and is everything going to be ok?” says Miranda Lopez after experiencing contractions during her first round of chemotherapy treatment while pregnant.

Miranda, a busy mom, wife, bilingual paralegal at an Omaha law firm and Fremont, Nebraska resident was at the beginning stages of planning for the arrival of her third child when one morning she felt a lump under her arm. She scheduled an appointment with her obstetrician and after a series of tests and a biopsy, Miranda was diagnosed with stage 3 triple negative breast cancer.

Her family had a history of cancer beginning with her great-grandmother, grandmother, and her own mother. Her family has been through genetic testing but they do not carry any breast cancer genes such as BRCA 1 or BRCA 2 which are two of the most common. “The results came back that we are just at a higher risk for getting breast cancer than other families,” said Miranda.

She knew what she needed to do, however the time of her diagnosis was a bit different than her other family members and at a much earlier age. “My family members were diagnosed in their late 40’s, 50’s and 60’s. I’m in my 30’s so I was kind of shocked. Because of my pregnancy, my medical team all worked together to provide care for me and the baby to determine what medications were appropriate and if they thought there were going to be any issues. I had a general surgeon, obstetrician, high-risk obstetrician, and Dr. Geetha, my medical oncologist at Nebraska

Cancer Specialists. I appreciated how Dr. Geetha is a mom too and she understood the challenges of being a mom and going through cancer treatments. Being pregnant going through treatments was even more difficult. She was so calming and nurturing to me throughout whole process.”

Miranda underwent 4 rounds of chemotherapy while pregnant. During her first treatment, at 23 weeks, Miranda began experiencing contractions. She was both scared and worried thinking she was going into labor. “Dr. Geetha worked closely with my high risk OB and determined the baby was ok and everything was on track after having an ultrasound. I experienced false contractions each time I had a dose of chemotherapy. It was just something that happened to me. I was fortunate that I was never really nauseous during my treatments. That was a good thing!”

“I appreciated how Dr. Geetha is a mom too and she understood the challenges of being a mom and going through cancer treatments... She was so calming and nurturing to me through the whole process.”

“Any time a patient presents with something else while receiving cancer treatment, it can be a challenge, especially when a patient is pregnant. We look at the safety of the chemotherapy medications in terms of protecting the mother and the baby. Working alongside the high-risk obstetrician is also important in regards to planning the timing of the chemotherapy

with the date of delivery. I can tell you, I was very relieved when she delivered a healthy baby,” said Dr. Geetha.

At 37-½ weeks, sweet baby Lilia was born, healthy and perfect. She was welcomed by mom, Miranda and dad, Juan, older sister and brother, Leilani and Ian. “This hasn’t been easy, but my community has been so supportive by hosting a benefit for our family, providing meals and babysitting. It’s hard missing certain activities with my kids or not being able to attend events, but it’s been so great to feel supported through all of this,” says Miranda.

When asked what’s next, Miranda said after 12 more rounds of weekly chemotherapy, she will go back to the planning stages with her medical team. “Because of the pregnancy, I wasn’t able to do all of the baseline scans at the beginning of my diagnosis. So once my 12 rounds of chemo are done, I will do more scans and we will determine what the next steps are. I know for sure I will have surgery, but we haven’t made any decisions as to what kind yet. Then I will have radiation therapy.”

As the holidays approach this year, Miranda is looking forward to embracing and celebrating what she has to be grateful for. “We take for granted sometimes what we have and especially this year, I’m extra grateful. I’m thankful for my medical team, for my family and the outpouring love and support from our community”.



Miranda enjoys spending time with her growing family.



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**Find out more at
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