



MedStar Health

MEDSTAR GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

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MedStar Georgetown MD

Proton therapy and coordinated care bring late-stage breast cancer into remission.

By Justine Hudock

In 2020, Tiffany Gannon was a highly successful professional at a consulting agency and a dog lover with two of her own when she started to notice subtle changes in her left breast's shape and texture. Deeply concerned, Tiffany visited a local hospital where she was diagnosed with HER2-positive stage 3 breast cancer.

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Amid the highs and lows of his health journey, Mike Gibby's love for the outdoors never left him. Photo by Hilary Schwab

Reclaiming an active lifestyle after CAR T-cell therapy successfully treats lymphoma.

By Susan Walker

Mike Gibby is attuned to the signals his body sends about his health. A longtime runner, he has always been able to gauge the state of his health by his running speed. Two years ago, on a ski trip to Utah, he found his daily runs on a high school track were slowing down. "What should have been a nine-minute mile took twelve minutes," remembers Mike.

Concerned, he made an appointment with his primary care provider when he returned home to McLean, Virginia. Neither that doctor nor a pulmonologist he was referred to could find a reason for his symptoms.

A few months later, he experienced intestinal pain. When the usual tests didn't uncover any reason for the pain, he underwent a CT scan and discovered that he had lymphoma. A biopsy found that the cancer was diffuse large B-cell lymphoma (DLBCL), an aggressive blood cancer.

After carefully reviewing the online biographies of oncologists in the region specializing in the treatment of DLBCL, Mike chose Kieron Dunleavy, MD, to treat his cancer. Dr. Dunleavy is a medical oncologist and hematologist who serves as section chief,

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Breast cancer survivor Tiffany savors the little things, like walks with her furry friends. Photo by Hilary Schwab

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5 Her kidney saved a life. Now she's calling on others to step up.

With hip pain relieved, young adventurer returns to exploring the world. By Emily Marrs

Maureen Fastie, 37, loves boating, fishing, and crabbing in the Chesapeake Bay. Drawn to an adventurous lifestyle, she spends her time traveling with her husband.

When recurrent pain began to limit her abilities, she knew something was wrong.

"At first, it felt like lower back pain that wouldn't go away," Maureen says. Over the course of 10 years, she saw many doctors and pursued various treatments for a misdiagnosis of herniated discs. "Because of my young age, I knew I wasn't getting the attention I needed from the doctors," she says.

"I needed to find a doctor who would take my suffering seriously."

—Maureen Fastie

While treasure hunting along the Southern Maryland shore in 2023, Maureen bent down to retrieve a piece of pottery, and a new level of pain shot through her, involving the hip region. She waited for the sensation to ease, but weeks passed with no relief.

"My husband and I go to a music festival every year, and I had the realization that I wasn't going to be able to ride my bike there because of my pain," she says. "It was a very sobering moment for me. I needed to find a doctor who would take my suffering seriously."

Fortunately, William Postma, MD, chief of Sports Medicine at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital, part of the MedStar Orthopaedic Institute, was recommended to Maureen



Maureen's determination shines through as she enjoys her physical therapy session.

Photo by Hilary Schwab

by another orthopaedic doctor in Baltimore.

The Institute has a long history of successfully treating complex conditions and sports-related injuries.

"When I met with Dr. Postma, I had to use a wheelchair and couldn't walk," says Maureen. "He was as alarmed about my pain as I was, and I knew immediately that he would be the one to help me heal."

A hip and knee specialist focused on athletic injuries, Dr. Postma determined with imaging that Maureen had left hip femoroacetabular impingement (FAI) with a labral tear: the ball and socket of her hip joint were mismatched, causing a tear in the cartilage of her hip socket.

"With injuries like these, people have pain in the front hip, groin, outside portion of the hip, or more rarely, the

buttock area, and struggle with activity, standing up, or sitting for long periods of time," says Dr. Postma, who serves as head orthopaedic surgeon for the Washington Wizards basketball team and for the Georgetown University Athletic Department. "Maureen had a more severe presentation of this injury, which significantly affected her hip function."

Two weeks after Maureen's initial appointment, Dr. Postma performed a hip arthroscopy to repair the tear. Employing a minimally invasive approach that uses smaller incisions to minimize scarring and enable faster recovery, the procedure involved entering her hip joint with a camera to assist in repairing the injury and reshaping the hip.

The surgery lasted about an hour, and Maureen went home the same day. Her recovery included using crutches for two weeks and physical therapy.

Feeling happy and strong again, Maureen is looking forward to traveling again—and being able to ride her bike to the music festival this year.

Take our free joint risk assessment at **MedStarHealth.org/HipHRA** to find out if you are at risk for developing hip issues.



Meet William Postma, MD



Visit **MedStarHealth.org/PostmaVideo**.

MedStar Georgetown University Hospital is part of our MedStar Orthopaedic Institute, with 50 orthopaedic surgeons at 19 locations throughout Washington, D.C.; Maryland; and Virginia. Visit **MedStarOrthopaedicInstitute.org** for a complete listing of physicians and locations.

Visit **MedStarHealth.org/MGUOrtho**, or to make an appointment with one of our orthopaedic specialists, call **202-444-8766**.

Heartfelt generosity shapes care at Verstandig Pavilion. By Emily Marrs

Featuring state-of-the-art technology, renowned clinical teams, and the most advanced medical innovations available, the Verstandig Pavilion at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital is leading the way in world-class clinical care.

In addition to advancements in care, the modernized features represent the extraordinary philanthropic partnerships that have made the Pavilion a reality, including a \$1 million philanthropic gift from Claire and Tom Joyce to support innovative surgical equipment for state-of-the-art operating rooms.

"Knowing the Verstandig Pavilion will serve as a leading-edge facility where people can receive the best treatment possible when they need it most has been incredibly gratifying for us."

—Claire Joyce

The Joyces' recent gift accompanies their previous \$5 million philanthropic investment, made in 2021, in support of the Pavilion and the Georgetown Scholars Program (GSP) Necessity Fund Endowment at Georgetown University.

"Everyone at MedStar Georgetown is so dedicated to excellence in health care, and we felt compelled to be a part of that," says Claire. "We had toured the Pavilion when it opened in December 2023, and we were so impressed by its innovative care spaces and operating rooms. We are very grateful for the opportunity to build on our past gift in support of MedStar Georgetown's extraordinary team."

"During the tour, we learned that only some of the surgical tables were going to be brand new, and we wanted to help change that from some to all," Tom adds. "When you have such a

beautiful and state-of-the-art space like the Pavilion, it's important that everything be as new and high-tech as possible."

"We are profoundly grateful for the heartfelt generosity of Claire and Tom Joyce and their passionate, long-term support of our institution," says Lisa M. Boyle, MD, FACS, president of MedStar Georgetown and senior vice president of MedStar Health. "Partnerships like the Joyces' are the cornerstones of our community and aid us in upholding the highest standards of quality care."

The Joyces' gift also afforded the Pavilion additional equipment for its intraoperative MRI system (IMRIS), the first of its kind in the region, providing real-time imaging without transferring surgery patients outside the operating room so neurosurgeons can precisely remove brain tumors, accurately place electrodes during deep brain stimulation surgeries, minimize risk, and reduce the need for post-op imaging and additional surgeries.

The Joyces' inspiration to give back and increase their original Pavilion gift stems from their longstanding dedication to the community. Tom has been a member of the MedStar Health Board of Directors since 2018. He was CEO of Danaher Corporation, before his retirement in 2020. Claire has served on Georgetown University's Board of Regents since 2017 and has been deeply involved in the GSP's Alumni Mentor Program.

Besides their significant community presence, another defining experience sits at the heart of the Joyces' philanthropic motivation: learning firsthand what exceptional emergency care means to a patient's family members and loved ones. The Joyces themselves spent two weeks in a Colorado hospital intensive care unit after their son was injured in a skiing accident in April 2022. He has since made a full recovery.



Tom and Claire Joyce's generosity ensures that our community has access to the groundbreaking technology that helps us drive forward world-class health care.

"Knowing the Verstandig Pavilion will serve as a leading-edge facility where people can receive the best treatment possible when they need it most has been incredibly gratifying for us," Claire says.

The Pavilion—which houses the latest technological and clinical advancements—provides top-notch care to those in the region. But it is also a testament to the philanthropic collaborations that helped to build it. All those who committed to this historic project share a vision to make world-class health care accessible to all.

The Claire and Tom Joyce Surgical Suite is a symbol of both the Joyces' goodwill and their powerful connection to their community. It speaks to their passionate interest in making the latest advancements in exceptional care possible.

To learn more about the Pavilion and how your support can make a significant difference, visit [MedStarHealth.org/Support](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Support), or call **202-444-0721**.

The problem with pollen: how seasonal allergies affect your health.

By Kerri Layman, MD, chief, Emergency Medicine, MedStar Georgetown University Hospital



With pollen in full force, spring allergies affect millions every year. Photo by Dragana Gordic

After a long winter, we're all looking forward to the warmer seasons. The sun is shining, the grass is greener, and flowers are sprouting up in vibrant waves of color. Spring is in full bloom. Unfortunately, that means seasonal allergies are, too.

If you're reaching for a box of tissues instead of enjoying the fresh air, you're not alone: some 81 million Americans experience seasonal allergy symptoms typically caused by pollen, an airborne allergen, every year, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

What causes seasonal allergies?

When we spend time outdoors, particularly in the warmer months, our pollen exposure increases due to flowering trees, grass, and weeds. In Washington, D.C., and surrounding regions, pollen season typically begins in late February and continues through August.

When birds, insects, animals, and the wind carry pollen grains, they come into contact with our eyes, nose, and skin. With a pollen allergy, your immune system responds by jumping into overdrive and producing antibodies to combat the allergen, which leads to a host of irritating symptoms.

These usually mild symptoms can include:

- Congestion
- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Scratchy throat
- Wheezing

Treating seasonal allergy symptoms.

Seasonal symptoms can cause frustration, especially with the plethora of outdoor activities popular in the spring and summer. And although no cure exists for seasonal allergies, these tips can keep unwanted symptoms at bay:

- **Shift your plans indoors.** While not always easy, avoiding allergens is best when possible. If symptoms worsen when outside, seek indoor activities until you're feeling well again. Keeping windows and doors shut during high-pollen-level times can also reduce pollen exposure.
- **Over-the-counter medications and home remedies.** Many over-the-counter medications relieve allergy symptoms, including antihistamines, which block the symptom-causing chemicals released by your immune system. Getting plenty of rest, staying hydrated, and consuming foods rich in vitamin C can support your body's natural allergy defenses and keep you feeling well.

- **Change your clothes.** After spending time outdoors, changing your clothes can remove remnants of pollen and reduce additional

exposure to the allergen. Showering, especially before bed, helps remove pollen from your skin and keeps it away from your bedding.

- **Monitor pollen levels and come prepared.** Checking the weather forecast and paying attention to the local pollen count helps when planning outdoor excursions and ensures you stay healthy while enjoying the warmer weather. If you do venture out when pollen levels are elevated, opt for accessories that cover your hair and eyes, such as hats and sunglasses, to reduce allergen exposure.



Kerri Layman, MD

When to seek medical care.

In most cases, pollen exposure and seasonal allergy symptoms resolve on their own. But sometimes, symptoms can lead to more serious health concerns. Those with respiratory conditions, such as asthma, may also experience more severe symptoms caused by pollen. Monitoring worsening symptoms is key in determining when to see a doctor.

Warning signs for severe allergy-related health conditions include difficulty breathing, hives, and swelling of the face or tongue. These symptoms warrant an immediate visit to the emergency department.

Fortunately, though irritating, seasonal allergies are generally not serious and are unlikely to affect an individual's health long-term. With a little mindful planning, you can comfortably participate in your spring and summer activities and enjoy the great outdoors—even with a pollen allergy.

Her kidney saved a life. Now she's calling on others to step up.

By Susan Walker

Anne Hughes got word that her cousin and her cousin's 16-year-old son Hamed had been medevaced from Benin in West Africa, where the family lived, to MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. The teen was in late-stage kidney failure and needed immediate treatment. Anne rushed from her home in Connecticut to the hospital in Washington, D.C., where the doctor told Anne and her cousin that without a kidney transplant, the young man might die. But if they could find a living kidney donor, he would be able to get the lifesaving surgery he needed more quickly. This was a much better option as 17 people die each day waiting for a deceased donor kidney.



Anne Hughes (right) with Steven Potter, MD (left). Anne's courageous act, paired with expert care, brought health and vitality to transform a loved one's life.

"For me, it was just two days of inconvenience to save a life—an amazing opportunity."

—Anne Hughes

Without a second of hesitation, Anne volunteered to be evaluated as a potential donor. During the process of being evaluated, she learned about paired kidney exchange (where a kidney that isn't appropriate for the initial patient is swapped for one that is, allowing multiple people to get a transplant).

"Even though I was hoping to be a match for Hamed, I signed up to be part of a paired kidney exchange if needed," Anne says. "If I wasn't a match, a paired exchange would not only help Hamed get the kidney he needed: it would also help many other people waiting for a kidney."

Adds Steven Potter, MD, a kidney and pancreas transplant surgeon within our MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute, "We have one of the largest paired kidney exchange programs in

the nation. People who might not otherwise get a kidney transplant have the opportunity to do so through this program. Living donation and paired kidney exchange literally save lives every day."

As a leader in kidney transplant, we are among the top programs in volume of adult kidney transplants in the country. MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute stands as a beacon of excellence in the field. Our transplant specialists rate among the foremost surgical talent in the United States, ensuring our patients receive the highest quality of care throughout their journey.

After undergoing a series of tests, Anne learned that she and Hamed were indeed a match and that she was healthy enough to donate her kidney. "Throughout the whole evaluation process, my health was prioritized," she says. "If any test suggested that I would need both kidneys to be healthy in the future, I would not have been a candidate. I really felt that I was in good hands with the medical team and my surgeon at MedStar Georgetown. The care I received was excellent."

The surgery went well for both Anne and Hamed. Anne was feeling well and discharged from the hospital the day after her donation surgery. And Hamed is now 23 and healthy.

"For me, it was just two days of inconvenience to save a life—an amazing opportunity. We celebrate the anniversary of the transplant every year," says Anne, who keeps in close touch with Hamed's mother.

Anne, who is now a state legislator in Connecticut representing the 135th House District, has become a vocal advocate of living kidney donation. Not only does she share her donation story, she also was instrumental in passing legislation that expands paid family medical leave in her state to provide coverage for transplant donors and recipients, something she did not have when she donated.

"Paid leave makes it feasible for more people to become living donors and save more lives," she says.

"I want to inspire as many people as possible to consider becoming living donors," Anne adds. "It's a rare opportunity to save someone's life."

Give the gift of life. Be a living kidney donor. Call **202-444-3714**, or visit **MedStarHealth.org/LivingDonorKidney** to learn more about living donation.

Reclaiming an active lifestyle after CAR T-cell therapy successfully treats lymphoma. *continued from page 1*

Hematology, and disease group lead, Malignant Hematology, for MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. After six chemotherapy treatments, a PET scan found that Mike's cancer wasn't responding well to the treatment, so Dr. Dunleavy referred him to Alaa Ali, MD, a physician in the Stem Cell Transplant and Cellular Immunotherapy program at MedStar Georgetown.

The program is the only adult, full-service center in the Washington, D.C., region for autologous and allogeneic stem cell transplantation and CAR T-cell immunotherapy that is accredited by the Foundation for the Accreditation of Cellular Therapy (FACT).

Transforming cancer treatment

"CAR T-cell therapy has transformed the treatment of a variety of blood cancers," explains Dr. Ali. "It offers another treatment path for patients like Mike whose cancer has not responded



Every step counts on the road to recovery. Today, Mike is back on the track, an embodiment of the spirit of resilience and determination. Photo by Hilary Schwab

"I strongly recommend the MedStar Georgetown Stem Cell Transplant and Cellular Immunotherapy team. Every person I encountered was fantastic, and I'm thankful for the care they provided."

—Mike Gibby

to first-line treatments. CAR T-cell immunotherapy and stem cell transplant have the potential to cure a significant percentage of blood cancer patients who, without these leading-edge interventions, would not survive their disease. In fact, based on recent published studies, CAR T-cell immunotherapy is now the standard of care as a second-line treatment for patients with the type of cancer Mike was diagnosed with."

The first step in Mike's treatment was gathering immune cells from his blood. Next, the T cells (white blood cells that

are part of the body's immune system) were separated out in the lab, genetically altered so they could "see" and kill cancer cells, and multiplied. After Mike underwent low-dose chemotherapy to make space in his immune system for the altered T cells, those cells were infused into his blood, where they will continue to kill cancer cells for years.

"MedStar Georgetown, Dr. Ali, and his team were the right choice," Mike says. "The team is exceptionally experienced with CAR T-cell therapy and also provided complete support throughout the process, even helping with an issue with my insurance company.

"I'm a scientist by training, and I liked that Dr. Ali shared clinical studies with me while I was making my decision about this treatment. He answered all my questions and is an

expert in the field, which helped me feel confident in my decision," Mike adds.

An expert team, compassionate care

The MedStar Georgetown program provides not only pioneering treatments but also comprehensive holistic support for patients and families to help them navigate the treatment and survival journey. The team includes expert physicians, a dedicated social worker, in- and outpatient nurse practitioners, nutritionists, financial and insurance coordinators, palliative care, rehabilitation treatment, and pretreatment coordinators.

Mike is feeling good and is back to working out and taking 10-mile walks on the weekend. He and his wife recently took a trip to Spain, where they hiked in Majorca and Madrid, and he took his sons hiking in the Alps this summer.

"I strongly recommend the MedStar Georgetown Stem Cell Transplant and Cellular Immunotherapy team. Every person I encountered was fantastic, and I'm thankful for the care they provided."



Meet Alaa Ali, MD



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/AliVideo](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/AliVideo) to watch Dr. Ali explain CAR T-cell therapy.

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/StemCell](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/StemCell) for more information. To schedule an appointment, call **202-993-0492**.

Proton therapy and coordinated care bring late-stage breast cancer into remission. *continued from page 1*



Flexibility and resilience go hand in hand for Tiffany as she practices her daily stretches.

Photo by Hilary Schwab

"My reaction was just, I have to jump into action, I have to take care of the problem," Tiffany recalls.

After a course of chemotherapy at the same local hospital that diagnosed her and extensive research to determine the best center for the remainder of her care, Tiffany chose MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. There, a team of specialists and care coordinators were ready to meet Tiffany's needs.

"I almost tear up a little bit now, thinking about this, because I feel like Dr. Rudra really looked at me as a human being."

—Tiffany Gannon

Initially, Tiffany met with David Song, MD, plastic and reconstructive surgeon and vice president of Medical Affairs, Chief Medical Officer, MedStar Georgetown, who stood out in her research because of the surgeon's excellent reputation in his field.

During their consultation, Dr. Song recommended that Tiffany simultaneously consult with MedStar Georgetown breast surgeon Ian Greenwalt, MD, for a double mastectomy. Dr. Song also recommended Tiffany discuss radiation therapy with Sonali Rudra, MD, director of the Breast Cancer

Radiation Oncology program at MedStar Georgetown, the first and most experienced facility offering proton therapy in the Washington, D.C., region.

Tiffany's MedStar Georgetown care coordinator swiftly arranged her surgeries so that they occurred on the same day to optimize her treatment outcomes—a double mastectomy under Dr. Greenwalt, then reconstructive breast surgery under Dr. Song.

Following these procedures, Tiffany met with Dr. Rudra for her final treatment consultation: proton therapy.

"With proton therapy," Dr. Rudra explains, "you can increase the dose directed to targeted areas, while minimizing the amount of radiation to the surrounding normal tissues. For someone young like Tiffany, the ability proton therapy grants to reduce radiation's harmful effects on the heart and lungs could be a huge benefit."

From their first meeting, Dr. Rudra's expertise and empathy brought Tiffany a great deal of comfort.

"I almost tear up a little bit now, thinking about this, because I feel like Dr. Rudra really looked at me as a human being," says Tiffany. "She asked how I was feeling, personally. Not just 'Are you in pain?' Our interaction wasn't scripted."

Tiffany's advanced breast cancer meant there was still a chance of recurrence despite the extensive treatments she had undergone. Additionally, some of her lymph nodes were close to her heart, so they could not be removed with surgery. These circumstances made her an ideal candidate for proton therapy, and Dr. Rudra recommended that Tiffany go forward with it as her final phase of breast cancer treatment.

Three years have passed since Tiffany's diagnosis and treatment, and she looks back on that time as having given her a new hope for how health care, as practiced by her treatment team, can look and feel.

In that time, Tiffany's breast cancer experience propelled her to leave the corporate world and instead use her expertise to consult on hospitality in small businesses.

"Having had breast cancer, I realized that I don't want to waste time," Tiffany reflects. "If I can get through chemo and cancer and radiation and multiple surgeries, I can figure out anything."



Meet Sonali Rudra, MD



Visit [MedStarHealth.org/Rudra](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Rudra) to watch Dr. Rudra explain proton therapy for breast cancer.

For more information or to schedule an appointment with one of our specialists, visit [MedStarHealth.org/ProtonTherapy](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/ProtonTherapy), or call **202-444-4639**.



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MedStar Georgetown University Hospital celebrates five-time Magnet® designation achievement.

MedStar Georgetown is honored to be part of an elite group of Magnet-recognized hospitals that have received this designation five times, representing approximately 1% of hospitals across the nation.

Magnet status, granted by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), underscores our nursing staff's commitment to world-class care and our culture of teamwork that places patient wellbeing at the heart of our community. Magnet organizations must show that they outperform other organizations on quality measures such as patient experience, patient outcomes, and the nurses' satisfaction in their work.

Our nursing team at MedStar Georgetown is the smartest, the most dedicated, and the most compassionate that our hospital has ever seen. We're proud to be home to a team of healthcare professionals whose patient-centered outlook helps us continuously exceed the highest quality standards of care.



Jo Ellen Carpenter, DNP, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, CENP, senior vice president and chief nursing officer at MedStar Georgetown (left), **Colleen R. Dudley, MSN, RN, CENP**, senior director of Nursing Operations and Patient Care Services (center), and **Lisa Cusaac, MSN, RN, OCN**, vice president, Nursing and Inpatient Operations (right), celebrate the Magnet designation.



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